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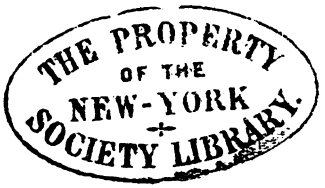
MY RUN HOME

MY RUN HOME

BY

ROLF BOLDREWOOD pseud. of
Thomas Alexander Browne.
AUTHOR OF
'ROBBERY UNDER ARMS,' 'THE MINER'S RIGHT,' 'THE SQUATTER'S DREAM,'
'A COLONIAL REFORMER,' ETC.



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CHAPTER I

OFF at last! Business matters arranged. Farewells said. The stately mail steamer sweeps down the harbour, and my long-dreamed-of voyage to the land of my fathers commences.

Our early experiences are luxurious. The great liner, delicately kept, strictly disciplined, largely provisioned, is apparently at the disposal of some twenty Australian passengers. We are ministered to by numerous attendants, oriental of aspect and manner. We revel in commodious unshared cabins. The captain is polite, the first officer amusing, the crew picturesque, the band talented. All is reassuring and rose-coloured.

The passengers seem in joint contribution from all the colonies. A New Zealander or two, a few Indian officers returning from furlough, an American, two or three squatters, a few ladies, no children to signify; on the whole, a cheerful and available society.

We soon settled down into the pleasant stage of nautical intimacy. We had much seasonable and some unseasonable weather. But ten days saw us at the last Australian port which we were to behold for some time. Albany had no attraction for us at that stage of our journey. We required no coals. There was little else to offer except opossum rugs and flowering shrubs. We invested sparingly in the furs, and were soon beyond

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the stormy Leeuwin, parting the warmer seas which told of the languor and romance of the tropics.

We had left Sydney in mid-winter, but the need was soon apparent of discarding clothes suited to that season, and adopting the gossamer garments of India. We fell into the track of the trade-winds, and with steady gales, and smooth seas, fared pleasantly on, until one morning I awoke to find the ship at anchor. Through the open port I saw a fleet of strange canoes, filled with gaily-dressed tawny people; saw, perchance, that we had strayed from our course upon these summer seas, and fallen upon the 'long-lost Aïdenn.'

It was Galle. There came my first glimpse of that 'old world' which had been to all my foregone life a world of shadows and dreams. The graceful cocoa-palms fringed the beach, waving their green plumes, as if responsive to the rhythm of the wave they love so well. Far in the distance rose a purple-tinted mountain; fatigued by bright blue waters and a glowing sky, the eye rested on the gorgeous forest of which the glittering foliage suggested aromatic gardens and spice-laden air. The hoary ramparts, half hidden by profuse vegetation, seemed frowning on the soft witchery of the magic scene. All was new, strange, intoxicating, with the glory and the glamour of a first gaze upon the burning charms of the East. Scorning the prosaic refreshment of a ship's breakfast, we committed ourselves to one of the narrow, broad-winged canoes, and, much marvelling at the outrigger, sailed away to the historic shore. A certain hotel was favourably known to one of our party, and to it we hasted.

The first requirement being fresh-water baths, I was conducted to a room with a stone floor and an excavated reservoir. Cooled and refreshed by a 'chotah hazree' of banana and pine-apple, I strolled forth for an

ante-breakfast saunter. It is difficult to suppress unconventional expressions of delight at the massive stone buildings of the olden Dutch period; their courtyards glorified by noble overshadowing trees. Walls and old trees are always poetic in combination. Then the little humped bullocks, drawing Lilliputian wood-carts; bazaars crowded with dark-skinned bargainers; the cool, narrow streets, with pillared balconied rows of shops on either side; the swarming, clean, copper-hued, gentle Cingalese! All is of the venerable, barbaric, storied past. But yesterday, as it seemed, from a new planet, I had apparently journeyed into a region where the value of time had, among other miracles and wonders, suffered change. A blacksmith, with trousers miraculously white, was engaged in shoeing a horse—a leisurely performance, which four friends, apparently of independent means, watched with mild interest.

A gray-haired tailor, with his subalterns, sat in his verandah, sewing in comfort and coolness. The entire population had the air of being contented, happy, and well fed, that condition to which philanthropists are always striving to bring the British poor—unsuccessfully.

At this stage of my observations the sensation of pleasurable interest was overcome by that of hunger, whereupon I hasted to join the merry party at the hotel, now gathered around a tempting and appreciated breakfast-table. Here the plans for the day were arranged. Some declared for the cinnamon gardens, others for a comprehensive stroll through the town and suburbs. Our division would hear of nothing but Wak-wallah, towards which pleasaunce we were soon driving behind small but active horses.

Of the glory of the tropical forest through which the well-kept, bright red road led us, how can one hope to convey even a dim impression? Columnar palms,

the jak fruit-tree, with fluted leaves of lustrous green, great topes of lofty feathery bamboos; flower, climber, shrub, and forest tree, all mingled in lavish glittering profusion and heaped-up vegetable wealth. The garden of Eden is henceforth a mental picture less faint and shadowy. The highway was occasionally crossed by neat stone bridges, spanning rivulets, the waters of which were utilised in the bright green rice-fields which broke the uniformity of the scene. In front, beside, behind, were groups of Cingalese. Some carried burdens, others walked gravely under brightly painted umbrellas. Children dashed out of the wayside huts with strange fruits and flowers to sell. One little elf cast his bouquet at us in a spirit of trust and hope. The ladies insist on getting out to pick water-lilies, floating pure and star-like on a granite-walled tank. It is a 'flower time' throughout. Arrived at Wak-wallah, we invested a grand old bungalow, of which the pillared balconies, the high-walled courtyard with massive gates, the general plan and architecture, told a tale of some *bon vieux temps*. It may be that one of the Dutch officials, putting pressure upon the easy-going natives, had settled the labour question in simple and practical fashion. They knew, certainly, how to build permanently and effectively. The lines of the old Dutch forts extend for miles; even their storehouses are mediæval castellated edifices.

We sat upon a rock, overlooking hills forest-covered, or dotted here and there with clearings. Before us stretched the vast rice-meadows, vividly green and level as a floor, the silver-threaded river meandering through. A stream of some pretension flowed immediately below us, where had been built anciently a wharf and walled-in cove. Within reach of our hands was a pine-apple growing wild, almost ripe. We saw the coffee shrub with green berries, and picked the nutmeg with its

fresh, crimson-lipped mace. In the outbuildings we watched native labourers chopping up cartloads of cocoa-nuts for oil. There was a cottage, all creepers and casements, wearing a decidedly honeymoon air. Far in the distance loomed the cloud-enfolded summit of Adam's Peak. We roamed about the glorious gardens or lounged in the verandahs of the shady old mansion the livelong day, with the abandon of holiday-enjoying children. But the shadows lengthened apace, and in the forest began to awaken its tribes of manifold life, to revel in the freshness of the season of joy in the tropics, the thrice-loved eve. So we re-entered our vehicles and took the homeward track.

Our hotel we found besieged by a clamorous crowd of sellers of jewellery and 'precious stones.' Nowhere is the cheating which allies itself with the manufacture of gold and gems more developed than at Galle. There are some really good workers in gold and ivory in the land whence came to King Solomon 'gold, apes, and peacocks'; but as finger-glasses were not in general use in his day, we may doubt whether so many jewelled rings were manufactured there then as now. This is the style of bargaining, not unusual, during an after-breakfast stroll :—

'You buy ring, massa? very fine stone dis, old di'mond, get from natif king.'

'Hum, ha! what do you want for it?'

Dealer, insinuatingly, and with keen look at Briton : 'Fine time for bargain, morning-time, massa, me let you have this (another keen look) for feefty guinea, massa. Dis very old di'mond.'

Briton, justly indignant: 'Go to blazes, you impostor! won't have it at any price.'

'Massa, massa! you too much angry ; you take him twenty guinea, dis morning-time.'

'Go away, you rascal, I don't want it.'

'Oh, massa (imploringly), you send me away, you send away riches; you give me ten guinea.'

'Get out of this, and leave me alone.'

'Massa, see here, me very just man; me give five guinea for this very ole di'mond. You English lord, you give me five guinea, you no tell blackfellow.'

'Will you clear out of this, before I hammer you?'

'Massa, say three guinea; must buy something for pretty missie. Missie very pretty.'

'I'll make *you* pretty directly, if you bother me any more. Do you see this stick?'

'Massa no beat poor natif. I make massa present, say one guinea.'

'Not one farthing; walk off—(native running, and with despairing howl)—massa, massa, ten shillin'.'

Our dinner was a festive and enjoyable entertainment. The evening was warm—but the fruit, the ice, the cooled wines, rendered any discomfort on that score bearable. The cheerful energy of the Australian party contrasted strongly with the debility and languor of certain returned Indians, to whom our mirth and interest were evidently inexplicable. We sat upon the balconies, smoking and chatting, long after the fairer portion of the party had deserted us. All was still but the murmur of the wave, the dreamy rustle of the cocoa-palms and serara trees, as the faint breeze stirred their slumbering leaves; the stars glowed large and lustrous in the dark blue heavens; the hum of the thickly-peopled suburbs came faint and more faintly to the air; the lights glimmered in the silent bay—hushed—calm—strangely beauteous were all things—glorious with the unearthly splendour of tropical night.

Next day we rambled over a course of 'sketches and travels' in the town. We visited the Government

schools, where the instruction seemed much like our own state seminaries. A goodly number of boys, with clean, pleasant faces, were assembled in a large airy room. They seemed on unnaturally good terms with their books. In another apartment were gathered many large-eyed, dusky damsels, under the rule of an English lady teacher. The countenances of the little people of both sexes were pleasing, often beautiful, with their large soft eyes, brilliant teeth, and clear brown complexion. Their delicate Eastern garments, too, were in all respects exquisitely clean. As the boys and young men wear their long black hair carefully stroked back behind a circular tortoiseshell comb, it is by no means easy to distinguish between the sexes. We saw two school boys, of twelve or thirteen years, sitting upon the ramparts, learning their lessons during the play-hour. They read a page of ancient history for us fluently, and when questioned, showed themselves to be well up in the life and times of one Sesostris. They certainly exhibited a degree of intelligence above that of the average British schoolboy. In manner there was no comparison. Unfortunately, the Asiatic mostly refuses further development at the age when, like the sap stirring in an oak, the more slowly-maturing northern intellect receives its most permanent impulses.

In the bazaars we noted the unvarying calmness of the oriental merchant. Whether selling fruit, cloth, spices or grain, he but spreads out his wares, and, sitting beside them with the sublime repose of a fatalist, leaves the issue to Allah or Boodha, as the case may be. Only in the sale of fish did we observe any departure, how slight soever, from this dignified immobility. These ephemeral wares have in all ages, it would appear, necessitated a little intensifying of the vulgar tongue, whether Greek or Latin, Tamil or Anglo-Saxon.

CHAPTER II

AT sea once more. It was late before the coaling was finished, but the harbour buoys were lighted up for our behoof, and the Eurasian pilot took us out safely, though he delayed his arrival on board to the manifest injury of the captain's temper. Our alert commander fretted and fumed. He apprehended a shift of wind, in which case delay, even danger, might arise. A messenger was sent to request the pilot to 'hurry up.' That official person had not finished dinner. 'Hang him and his dinner too,' swore the captain. 'Why doesn't he take us out, and go to sleep for a week after? Calls himself a pilot too! My idea of a pilot is a man who comes out to you in the North Sea about two in the morning, with a stiff gale blowing. A pilot!'

The indispensable dinner, and the skipper's last reserve of patience, came simultaneously to an end. Just as he was vowing to lay all sorts of complaints and impeachments before the dread tribunal of the P. and O. directors, the post-prandial potentate boarded us, and we took our way, down a wave-lit avenue of illuminated buoys.

The passenger list had received additions since our arrival at Galle; thus, the invasion of cabins was a necessity which we deplored, but could not reasonably dispute. 'Pick me out a fellow that tubs,' said I to the handsome purser, 'or you'll have "mutiny on the high seas" before we're a week older.' 'It shall be done, my dear fellow!' answered he with emotion. I wrung his hand feelingly. The vow was kept.

Our new comrades were of mixed callings and nationalities. Indian officers and civilians bound for England, mercantile men from China, from the islands, from the Dutch colonies. A few Ceylon coffee-planters; a governor of the Philippines, with a pretty young Spanish wife. A considerable batch of 'Indian' children, with or without mothers. These last were very violent Turks, and interfered much with contemplative enjoyment. Brought up almost entirely by their ayahs, over-indulged, and learning at an early age to despise them as belonging to an inferior race, they were most over-bearing little despots. They frightened the Australian children, at the first meals they attended in common, by the fierceness of their gestures, and the recklessness of their manners. These little angularities soon arranged themselves.

Having talked out the whole series of Galle experiences, we begin to take stock of available amusements. We play chess, quoits, backgammon, and whist. The band is exceptionally good; and the nights being mild, our obliging captain has the lamps lighted, and permits pleasant little dances. Many of the purchases made at Galle now come to light. Tortoise-shell bracelets, and ornaments of a delicate yellow; *crêpe* shawls, rare and costly; rings and brooches, which are keenly inspected by the experienced Indians, and in some instances denounced as counterfeits. Our society is serene, contented and æsthetic, a species of seafaring Utopia. Why tempt the land, with all its cares and dangers? 'We will go home no more,' but lingering in these halcyon seas, float for ever on this charmed main!

Still warm, breezy, smooth. The trade-wind is faithful. Yesterday we made 313 miles. I am not going to transcribe the log-book, and I swear to abstain

from all mention of the albatross. But the line must be drawn at the flying-fish. I am delighted with the first flight of these elegant little sea-flutterers. The ship wears a gala appearance, festooned with fruit from the happy isle. The temperature being steadily warm, we are all in summer garb, and the ladies' toilettes are becoming *belles à faire peur*. Our appetites may be described as good. We read a good deal, of mornings, borrowing and lending vigorously.

A muster of the crew is *de rigueur* before prayers. The British tars are clean and neat, but the Lascars, dingy enough on week-days, are truly gorgeous. With gold-embroidered skull-caps, brilliant sashes and scarfs—white, blue, and crimson caftans—they resemble the fellow-voyagers of Sindbad. They form two rows, while the captain and the chief officer walk between the ranks, with searching countenance. They salaam with deepest oriental humility, man by man, as who should say, 'I trust that the lord of the ship and of my life will graciously abstain from ordering my execution *this* time'; and are piped down. We then join in the Church of England service, which the captain reads in simple and manly fashion.

Gaily we steamed along, blowing the black off our fresh coals, until arose the bold headland of Garde-de-feu, and we saw with our eyes a land familiar from childhood's hour, but wholly impossible to dissociate from books. We felt as if we were sailing on a map, and should be able to touch the remaining continents directly. These rocks and sands looked not, to our vision, as others, wild and bare; a voice seemed to rise from them, sounding in our ears that old name—Africa! Africa! Rugged in the hazy distance, the mountains of Abyssinia reared their bold peaks, harmonising with their frowning Cape, which looked worthy to be the

southern extremity of the Ancient Land. Now we headed for Aden, and the Straits of Babelmandeb, walled in by jagged masses of volcanic peaks, like lava hills dropped hissing into the sea.

A few more days of steaming—in all senses; more starry nights, and we again approach the land. Running into a prepossessing bay, we find ourselves promptly surrounded by boats, and deafened by the clamour of Eastern tongues. We have reached Aden!

There is no question of remaining on board, though our stay must be short. Even if the mere placing one's foot upon dry land were not in itself a great and glorious thing, a coaling-steamer is not a pleasant abode. So all departed in boats rowed by the Arab-featured, negro-haired Somali. They are a section of an Abyssinian tribe, and are powerful, well-made men. Their profiles are often regular and handsome, with high foreheads, but always woolly hair. This they dye red for full dress.

Aden is an abnormal, weird-looking place; a huge crater with jagged peaks and lofty pinnacles of naked rock. If an enchanter were to fly suddenly out of the topmost cone, he would cause no surprise, so congenial are the surroundings. The eye is startled by metallic-looking rifted rocks, sharply outlined against the clear blue sky. Calcined, volcanic, utterly bare of vegetation, the occupation of Aden by us is calculated to excite extreme amazement in the breast of the non-strategetical beholder.

The British Government has built a line of forts around and over the hill, cutting it off from the rest of Arabia, and rendering it tolerably safe by sea. In any place where the rock is not more than one hundred feet high, you remark embrasures and a line of cannon. We saw camels led by Arabs, carrying bales of wool, loads

of green stuff, vegetables, even firewood. On the latter requisite, piled high above a camel's back, stood a live goat, doubtless admiring the prospect. We passed through a tunnel in a rock, an important piece of engineering, where was also a guard-house with a Sepoy guard. Westward stretched endless plains, save where a range of dark blue hills crossed the line of vision in the far distance—the Yellow Desert, still sacred to the untamed children of Ishmael. But you dare not ride ten miles from the outer gates of Aden.

Captain Campbell, who was quartered here once, told me that four of his brother officers, on a shooting excursion, made their arrangements for lodging inside of a ruined courtyard. An Arab fanatic crept over the wall in the night and stabbed one of them as he slept. The next man to him rushed at the assassin and knocked him down, but tripped over a stool and fell. The Santon, rising first, stabbed him several times in the back, and fled. This officer had ugly wounds, but survived. The one first wounded died. Another Arab presented a petition to a young officer in the town, and, as he received it, struck at him with a heavy dagger, and nearly cut his arm off. The wounded man sprang from his horse, wrenched the dagger from his enemy, and killed him at a blow; then galloping to the cantonments, fell off in a faint at the door of the mess-house. Now every Arab is searched, and has his arms taken away at the gate. The Beni Ishmael are stubborn and tameless, as of yore, and bow not the neck to strange rulers.

The tanks of Aden are seldom unvisited, except by hasty or incurious voyagers. They are ancient reservoirs of immense antiquity, supposed to have been chiefly built by those grand colonisers, the Romans, whose 'permanent improvements' all over the world

testify to their sound ideas of settlement and engineering. In the rare period of rainfall, the water flows down a rugged cleft in the mountain, filling a succession of tanks. These, long ruinous, were partly filled in, until the British Government re-excavated and enlarged them. Portions of the cement picked out were perfectly sound. We walked on terraces of solid masonry, and looked into vast irregular basins, where the water, supplied by late rains, was deep and curiously clear. All were not finished. To these we saw long ant-like strings of coolie women carrying baskets of cement on their heads. Indian trees of shady foliage had been planted around, which henceforth will beautify the place. All over the East, trees, verdure, and water go together. Heat and moisture are the leading conditions of growth, and the latter being supplied, green fields and waving foliage appear with magic speed in the most unlikely localities.

A native infantry regiment was quartered here, the officers of which doubtless found Aden life monotonous. Billiards and bitter beer, polo and pig-sticking, alleviate the lot of the British subaltern in the East. But on a sentinel station like this, where walking or riding was hardly practicable, existence was dull inside the walls, and dangerous outside. Without society, occupation, or locomotion, think of his hardly-won military privileges, ye moneyed loungers of Britain, who find London slow and the Continent tiresome! 'How in the world did you ever pass the time for two years in this furnace with the fire out?' said I to Captain Campbell. 'I used to fish a good deal,' answered he; but his features assumed a contemplative expression, as if he wondered now, as much as any one, how he endured his captivity.

After going through the lines, and marking the

comprehensive *impedimenta* of a Sepoy regiment, we went exploring. Every soldier had his wife in camp with him, and perhaps another female relation or two. This must lead to complication, one would think, in the day of battle. We passed the Turkish Gate, whence I could see the hazy plains of the far-stretching desert. My heart yearned to it, as being the Arabian 'bush.' I felt seriously tempted by the invitation of a cheerful young Arab, who ambled beside us on a dromedary, to go with him and see his tribe. But 'duly observing all things,' as the Ceylon schoolboy said, I watched Hassan pass out of the guarded portal, and decided against availing myself of his kindness, for the present. 'Most happy some other time when passing this way,' etc.

We returned to the hotel for lunch; then lounged about the shops, kept by Jews and Parsees, where we made investments in cool clothes, which were temptingly cheap—trousers half-a-crown, shoes four shillings. Arab puggarees, crimson and everything, in silk, also found purchasers at reasonable rates. Coral red and white, ostrich eggs and feathers, also gazelles, were in the market: these last exhibited by a shy, wild-looking Arab boy. They were lovely, delicate little dears, and I should like to have bought them on my way back. I did buy a few ostrich feathers; for the eggs I had no present use, not having a sitting hen handy. One of our party disported himself upon the back of a camel; he was nearly spilt, as the fell beastie raised his hinder proportions first, which he had not calculated on. Others engaged in donkey races, which led to a fall or two. We saw the clip of some bloated Arabian squatter arriving, two bales to a camel. I wondered what he paid his shearers, and whether they struck occasionally. The wool was not 'first combing' prob-

ably, but doubtless it had its commercial value. 'The pleasures and palaces' of Aden were exhausted at a comparatively early hour, so most of us, after setting the Somali boys diving in the shark-haunted waters of the bay for small silver coins, found our way on board before sunset. As we sat watching the chattering crews of various races in all kinds of boats around the ship, the sun's disc sank below the horizon, and, as at the wave of a magic wand, every Parsee among them fell upon his knees and devoutly offered up the evening prayer. Utterly careless were they of occupation, association, or comment, unconscious of aught but the sacred observance which they performed. They remained for a stated period, engaged in their devotions, then arose with an air of simple dignity. How many of us Christians dishonour our faith by postponing its rights to the most trifling external hindrances! About eight o'clock the great steamer moved gracefully from her anchorage, and glided, under the cloudless, star-clustered sky, into the waters of the Red Sea.

CHAPTER III

THE heat is now perceptibly greater. Comparisons are made by Indians and Australians as to the relative heat of their respective climates, and their effect upon the average Briton. To settle this question it was only necessary to look at the men who had passed long years in the East or in the South Land. The Australians, though bronzed, were vigorous and thoroughly British in appearance; while the Indians were chiefly sallow, languid, and listless in all their movements.

For my own part, I did not find the warm, moist, breezeless atmosphere so intolerably oppressive as travellers usually describe it. There were no flies, no mosquitoes—those bloodthirsty emissaries of the fiend in all hot climates. There was shade, there was repose, with cheerful society, books, and ever-recurring marvels of sea and land. I had been in worse places, and felt small inducement to complain. My sensations were not untruly, though perhaps too expressively, described by an opulent New Zealander, who thus spoke at breakfast: 'They make a deal too much of this Red Sea—I don't think nothin' of it. Felt it fifty degrees 'otter on the plains, and ate up alive with flies into the bargain. Steward, bring me a cup of very 'ot tea.'

It was noticeable that experienced elders, long in India, fought shy of the spirit decanters in these latitudes. Were strict temperance observed, I doubt not that few of the sudden deaths which take place in the Red Sea would occur. As it is, the casualties are chiefly among the hard livers, invalids, or those whose constitutions have been sapped by long residence in the East.

Though no man of ordinary health need fear the ordeal of a Red Sea passage, there are persons to whom it must be unpleasant, if not dangerous. We had, for instance, a major of Native Infantry, who could have played Falstaff without stuffing, had our theatricals taken the direction of Shakespeare. He managed of mornings to waddle upon deck, and for the rest of the day, ensconced in a huge chair, lay panting like a stranded turtle. Doubtless he 'felt the heat.'

We had a few individuals who rose above uniformity as the Indian contingent began to show out. The Colonel, more than thirty years in India without furlough—a relic of the good old times—of 'Company

Sahib.' Mild, almost sad of mien, he had perhaps survived all his near kin, and acquired an Hindustani tinge. One wondered that he should have wished to come back to Europe, to die in what, after such a lapse of years, must have been to him a foreign land, and

> Like a stricken deer to stray,
> Where all are strange and none are kind.

He might have sat for the portrait of Colonel Newcome, though I fancy he lacked the occasional fire of that historic veteran, as I heard an irreverent youngster reminding him that when he got to England he was not to ask for 'curry-rice' or for a 'lotah.'

We were privileged also with the company of an illustrious dame, returning laden with the gold of Ind —'Oh, fierce and luxurious Dolores!' Tall, handsome, with a grand air and superb figure, as she sat under the deck awning with a tiger-cub at her feet, she looked like 'some barbaric queen brow-bound with burning gold.'

We took an Arab pilot on board at Aden, a grave middle-aged personage, through whose unerring knowledge of the rocks and shoals of the Red Sea, or from other causes, we steered prosperously free from mishaps such as have occurred more than once on mail-boats. Our inquiring youngsters asked Ali-ben-Daood how he liked leaving his wife at Aden—a fact they had somehow discovered—and having to remain at Suez for the next steamer. He calmly made answer, that he had a wife there also. They were unprepared for this solution.

We are fortunate in having unbroken fine weather; and now, lo! the clustered minarets of Mocha. We see the Djebel Moussa, and finally approach the narrow end of the Red Sea—the theatre of the grand historic tragedies of the Old Testament. We anchor, totally

without further incident, in the roadstead of Suez. A flat sandy village-covered mound, dominated by a great stone caravanserai of the P. and O., presents itself, and the first half of our adventurous voyage is over. Our mountain of luggage follows us as we land, and we bid farewell with regret to our thorough-going commander and the jolly officers of the *Malta*.

The entrance to Suez is romantic and suggestive. The lofty chains of mountains, both on the Arabian and Egyptian side, with their numberless spire-like peaks—the wide, bare desert with distant strings of camels—the close vicinity of Horeb and Sinai, called up the past, laden with images of awe and grandeur. On the north-west shore stretches the irregular outline of the mountains of the Holy Land, softened by a delicate azure-tinted haze, or coloured like the roof of a Moorish hall in the crimson and gold of sunset. Beyond them lies the Land of Promise. Over this narrowing strait of the Red Sea passed the desert-worn Hebrews, fainting with toil, frantic with terror, as the spears of the fast-pursuing Egyptian host flashed through the dust of the desert, and the low murmurous roll of chariots came over the waste, faintly out-toned by a far clash of cymbals.

Aden could not have been described as beautiful by the most lively tourist with the most unimpaired digestion. Suez was even less entertaining. A couple of hours intervened between our arrival and landing, and this fragment of a day bore hardly upon its resources. We watched a camel train partly loaded, the animals composing which stood and lay about the square in sullen resignation ; some with piles of chests, bags, and boxes secured to their backs, or permitting the same to be piled upon their carcasses, under protest. A camel has an odd kind of growl when unhappy in

mind, and is, besides, not such a fool as he looks. After a fair amount of luggage has been strapped on, in his estimation, when the 'next article' was brought forth, the camel would twist his long neck and growl in a subdued but savage manner, as who should say, 'What! another box; oh, hang it, that's too bad!' Having gained some slight information about the habits and caprices of camels, we adjourned to the barracks. At the guard-house gate stood three Turkish officers with flowing beards and garments of truly Ottoman easiness of fit. One of our civilians, who knew a little Turkish, had exchanged a few sentences with them, when a dark-bearded, extra-Mahometan-looking personage pronounced a word of our language with such accuracy that we offered our clumsy compliments on his English. 'Yes, pretty fair, I suppose,' he said; 'I'm an Irishman!' We were taken aback for the moment at this frank avowal, for he certainly, as far as beard, bronze, and bearing went, made 'a most iligant Turk.' It was, of course, nothing new for one of his nation to rise in a foreign service.

Our party manages to get a carriage to itself, in which we are socially comfortable as the evening train moves across the desert. The desert! ye powers of fate and steam—and are we actually, in the flesh, transacting an Arabian night—swiftly speeding in the fire-carriage of the infidel (may his beard, his grave, his grandfather, his etc., etc., be defiled) over the path of the Bedaween, the Arab steed, the camel, the simoon—all the delicious Oriental abstractions of our story-fed youth—towards the dream-city of the Caliph, even Grand Cairo. It is too much, I shall die, like a schoolboy who is convinced that envious death *must* step in before the unearthly happiness of the day of leaving school. Chaffham (N.I.) supposes I must be

much astonished at this (to me) wondrous novelty; asks 'why Boldrewood don't exhibit surprise.' 'Australians all the same,' he kindly adds. 'One would think he had seen it all before.' No curiosity, no interest; sort of savage indifference. I *have seen it all before*, with many things more—desert solitudes, colossal ruins, world-old palaces, marble fountains, cyprus groves, demons, magicians, fairies, princesses, monarchs, slaves, the kingdoms and the inhabitants of that realm wherein *he* has not travelled much. But I only think this. I say, that 'I seem to have read about it all—not unlike the Lower Darling, without the salt bush, strikes me.'

The ladies laugh at this. Chaffham says we're 'all alike. Went home with fellah from Port Phillip, years ago—time of omnibuses drawn by mules, don't yer know, no train then—close to Kafr Zayat. Warden missed pocket-book; sure he'd dropped it; must go back when carriage stopped. Fellahs tried to stop him—get lost—Arabs dangerous. Most obstinate fellah! swore he would go; run the tracks back. Told, if wind came, blow away tracks. Sure to get lost then—robbed, die of thirst. No use; said he'd been in back country before; make *some* place; *would* have pocket-book. Went back, and by George, sir, found pocket-book, and caught up carriage just as driver fellahs going on without him. Most surprisin' cool fellah—near thing, though!'

Having unburdened himself of this reminiscence, and rounded off his theory about Australian imperturbability, Chaffham leans back exhausted, and finally falls asleep. We gradually follow his example, or, at any rate, become silent, as we are borne along a succession of sand wastes alternating with irregular mounds, much like coast-bordering hummocks. Ever and anon a cluster of village dwellings, a square flat-roofed Turkish

cavalry barrack, then a few trees, a girdle of vivid green, and lo! the domes and minarets of Cairo. We rush through a suburb, with high-walled gardens and courtyards, bursting with vegetation. Men are working water-wheels for irrigation with the aid of buffaloes. Crowds of people, Turks and others, pursue their way upon donkeys. Rows of trees, umbrageous, gloriously green, refresh our desert-wearied eyes. Fields of cotton, where the labourers close the shallow water-channels with the foot. Lines of Turkish cavalry horses picketed, there being a military movement in progress. All such things meet our gaze, as we reach the terminus full of hope and joy. Omnibuses drawn by mules were in waiting, and after the usual scramble, we were driven off to the Hôtel d'Orient. Shepheard's is the great Cairo-English Hotel, but as it had received the day before 150 outward-bound passengers, it was a trifle full or so. Hence we 'bussed forth in search of fresh inns and bedrooms new. Having accomplished this little matter, we strolled over to Shepheard's to see friends.

The steps of this hostelry were crowded with hatted, capped, and turbaned Britons. In front, yelled and chattered an army of donkey-boys. As we entered we saw one bold Englishman hurried off, apparently against his will, on a frantic donkey, pursued by a legion of boy fiends, yelling and goading the animal, as if he had been the scapegoat bound for the wilderness with his despairing rider. Then passed by a marriage procession. A company of disreputable Egyptians (but they are all like one another in *that* respect) with tomtoms, and the discordant 'rabab,' like a bagpipe out of tune, if that instrument be subject to so delicate a derangement. Ever and anon they raised their voices with a kind of seagull clamour. They

surrounded the bridegroom, a sheepish-looking lad of twenty, who looked bored and fatigued by the entertainment.

Our dragoman—permit me to repeat succulently that sonorous official title—our dragoman informed us that a ball was to take place that night, and urged us to go. We united in opinion that a ball in Cairo would differ from other entertainments of the sort, and decided to go.

Pending dinner, we committed ourselves to donkeys, and sallied forth into a sort of *plaza*, immediately in front of our lodgings at the Hôtel d'Europe. The population of Cairo is sufficiently variegated: French, English, Turks, Italians, Germans, Americans, Jews, Greeks, Syrians, and negroes, with divisions of *heathenesse* unnamed, were characteristically amusing themselves in the warm dusty twilight. We nearly ran over a respectable Turk. There are no footpaths, and the Turks are too dignified to get out of your way. All the road-warning is transacted by yells, and as every one else is crying aloud, the difficulty, as in a mixed musical assembly, is to get attended to. Here comes a string of camels, loaded with firewood, brushing the people away like flies! Their drivers say little, on the principle of those of Pickford's vans—they may hurt you, but you cannot hurt them. So they do not complicate your arrangements for safety by conversation.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN we entered the ball-room, we found it large, well lighted, and well filled. The band was fair, as indeed were many of the company, which last was

rather mixed, both as to race and social degree. There were Turks, French, and Germans, besides our noble countrymen. I think we saw 'Arry Belville' and friends. But the music, as before mentioned, *was* respectable, the scene enlivening, and when the fast dances struck up, certain of us answered in every pulse as to a trumpet-call of old, and went to the front for partners.

Later on, a Greek girl attracted me by her calm, statuesque face, and splendid eyes, the brow low, magnificent hair, and the true antique moulding of every feature. I asked her to dance—not a Pyrrhic dance, but a galop. She inclined her head with a slightly wondering look in her great eyes, and stood up. She was lithe and gracefully fleet as the wood nymphs of her land, when the great god Pan sounded his reed, and the fauns peeped through the whispering leaves. Perhaps we had the best of it, in the matter of cool claret, in this modern retreat. I managed to make myself comprehended so far, after the dance, as I suggested the grateful beverage. But now arose international difficulties. I commenced hostilities—compliments, I mean—in French. She shook her head. '*Parlate Italiano?*' Another shake. This was perhaps as well. '*Me parla Grecque*,' was all the burden of her song, and not a word of any other tongue would she own to. Here was an embarrassment. This glorious Greek with an antique profile and unfathomable eyes, and no mortal means at my command of conveying the information to her. How I regretted my neglected classics! But would a verse of Homer help me in my need? Should I try her with '*Zoe mou sas agapo?*' or should I remain for the winter in Cairo and devote myself to the acquirement of modern Greek?

These questions were left unsolved when—at that hour which in all lands is 'a little too early'—our

dragoman mustered our party unsparingly, and drove us, boy and lantern escorted, to our caravanserai. He gave us a hint, *en passant*, that if we took any of the narrow pitch-dark lanes between high walls, so common in Eastern cities, we might not, quite as a matter of course, find our way back again.

Postponing sleep to a convenient season, O'Hara and I departed on donkeys at sunrise to see the Mosque, a summer palace of the Pacha, and the Citadel. We rode through the decayed, corpse-like ruins of what was once Grand Cairo; through narrow streets of lofty ancient houses, with latticed balconies, from which Fatima or Zobeide might have looked and languished. We jostled Ali the water-carrier, in requital of the rudeness of Hassan the camel-driver, who had jostled us. We saw Cogia, with ragged turban and patient expression, on the way to his rope-walk; while one-eyed Calendars were so numerous that we came to the conclusion that other influences besides the tail of the enchanted steed must have been acting on imprudent princes. The Cadi we saluted as became his rank; but he scowled on us as infidels; whereat I am afraid, he being pursy and pantomimical of aspect, we burst out laughing.

Our path led us on a gradually rising, winding road, far above the level of the city, until we stood at the outer gate of the marble-paved courtyard of the Mosque. There an attendant brought us cloth slippers, which he tied over our unbelieving boots. So might we not profane the holy place. Then we strode through the noble courtyard, surrounded by lofty pillars of the delicate golden-veined marble of which the whole edifice is built. The Mosque itself is a grand and lofty structure, rich with delicate ornamentation. You enter a vast hall, in the centre of which rises a dome of

majestic height and proportion. The sides, as distinct from the centre of the roof, are also domes, but subordinated to the central one, both in size and ornament. You gaze around, standing in a forest of colonnades, each pillar a wonder in size, material, and tracery. Magnificent chandeliers, in all forms of gold and crystal, hang from the roof. A richly ornate curtained enclosure protects from vulgar gaze the ladies of the seraglio. A shrine, to use the language of cathedrals, upon which the highest conceptions of Oriental art have been lavished, holds the relics of the great Caliph.

Hard by was the Citadel, in the courtyard of which the treacherous slaughter of the Mamelukes by that old tiger, Mehemet Ali, was effected. A perfectly level pavement, having the Mosque on one side, the Palace on the other, and the Citadel in the rear, it lies open towards the city and the Pyramids. A low battlement runs round the open portion, beneath which was a drop of sixty feet or more.

The view, in the clear cool morning, was wide and varied. Beneath us lay Cairo, with its flat-roofed houses, into which, Asmodeus-like, it seemed as if you could peep, beholding their inner life. Westward stood the Pyramids—calm, vast, unchanged amid the unchanged desert. Northward, to the farthest limit of vision, stretched the broad valley of the Nile, with the mighty river, the life of Egypt, winding through the rice-fields as in olden Pharaoh days. Eastward and south, camels are sailing in long swaying files over the desert ocean. We marked, as the sun lighted up the brilliant vegetation, the wondrous power of irrigation—the magical change from the bare red sands of the desert to the vivid verdure of the suburbs. Life is astir with the first dawn in the East. Water-wheels were revolving; asses were drawing water from deep

wells, as in the days of Abraham; rows of heavy-foliaged trees gladdened the eyes; the murmur of a great population was faintly audible, the low hum of which was in harmony with the clear, golden, Eastern morn. All told of the ancientest days—of the elder races of earth. Of the first recorded performances upon its surface, this had been the theatre. Among the earliest actors in the world's grandest tragedies were the people upon whom we now gazed.

It was difficult to realise that the pavement upon which we strolled, asking flippant questions, had been slippery with the blood of the murdered soldiery. Through yonder gateway rides the Mameluke band, jesting and heedless, with their richest arms, on their finest horses. The gates close quietly behind them. The sound is ominous in the ears of the elder Beys. A time of mirth and reckless laughter, a time of doubt and undefined dread, as none appears to receive them—and—the roll of musketry—the roar of artillery—the emptied saddles—the screams of wounded horses, tell the tale of the Pacha's death-feast! They are trapped and doomed. A momentary survey of the massive walls, the unyielding gates, the precipice sheer and stark with piled rocks at its base, brings the stoicism of despair to the boldest, the most sanguine, the most *rusé* of the band. Oh, for one wild charge, one shout, as each man would fain put spurs to his steed and lift his sword for the last time! That were to die as became the fearless and splendid chivalry of Egypt!

It may not be. A verse from the Koran, a prayer to Allah, and each man yet unwounded sits calmly on his charger, waiting for that death-shot which has been recorded in the Book wherein is written the hour of his birth, the mode of his death. Their white-bearded chief—as *gaillard* this morning as the youngest soldier

of the troop, as quick with the jereed, still unmatched with the scimitar—mark how grandly he reins his excited charger, and looks in the face of Death! He knows that the pitiless Pacha sits even now, watching, and unmoved. There is no change in the still face and awful eyes which have so long looked upon blood and doom. Nought save a contraction of the hand shows that Mehemet Ali is an eye-witness of the death-agonies of his own proud band, whom he has a hundred times bidden to feast and foray. Has he dreams? Will he ever see in them the reproachful gaze of old Achmet Bey, as for one moment his eyes turn towards the spot where the Tiger Pacha sits in shielded safety, as if they could pierce through wall and lattice? and the next, horse and rider form one crushed, moaning, gore-stained mass.

But Emin Bey, the youngest, the most reckless of that reckless soldiery, the show horseman and swordsman of the troop—must *he* die like a trapped jackal? His eye blazes at each fresh volley, as he spurs up to the concealed batteries, and dares the cowards to come within the sweep of the Mameluke sabre. 'No shot has power to harm *him*,' say the grim veterans, as they smile even now, noting to each other the gallant bearing of the darling of the band. Less and less grows the haughty group, fuller and deeper swells the red plashing tide. Emin Bey looks long and fondly on the mighty river, on the dark and gloomy relics of Eld, at the few palm trees by the desert border, marking the spot dearest to his heart; and then he takes the good horse by the head, gives the well-known shout, and sends him straight at the battlement, not far from the western angle. Over goes the 'White Hawk,' spreading out his legs as if he were going to clear Grand Cairo. The 'White Hawk,' pride and tradition of the Aneyzah!

but he will never snuff the free desert breeze more—he lies on the rocks beneath the fearful leap, mangled and motionless. Yet he has fallen fair. He has saved his master, who has yet strength to crawl to the nearest house, and gain one of the many hiding-places a Cairene suburb affords—lost for a time to the world, most of all to the bloody Pacha! The day is done. River and pyramid, city and desert, lie dim in the darkening eve. The artillery is silent. Where are the Mamelukes? A ghastly heap—'rider and steed in one red burial blent'—alone shows where that haughty historic band, gay with banners and splendid with arms, rode in with the rising sun.

We were conducted through several interesting rooms in Said Pacha's palace. The carpets were handsome and luxuriously soft to the tread, while ottomans were placed around. Other furniture was there none, except in one apartment, where French sofas and chairs, rather tawdry than rich, were strewed about. Nothing was calculated to make people very envious, except a marble bathroom, which certainly was *de luxe*. Walls, floors, and sunken bath were of the same delicately beautiful, cool material. What gorgeous splashing in the burning summer days it suggested!

We came to the end of our explorations and admirations, and donkeyed back down the winding way and steep streets. I had formed the idea that a donkey could not fall. Of this kindly prejudice I was disabused. While making rather good time down a steepish street, my ass of Egypt came on to the crown of his head, casting me into a crowd of true believers, who rejoiced unaffectedly at the downfall of the Giaour.

The Egyptians themselves—that is the fellaheen, and whatever others, minor officials, and so on—are not of an appearance to prepossess people on their travels.

They are lemon-coloured, dirty, thievish, cringing mongrels (I trust I do not border on the uncharitable). From the ravages of ophthalmia, considerably aided by their unclean habits, the number of the blind and one-eyed is surprising. In old days they had a fashion of putting out one eye to avoid the conscription of the period. Old Mehemet Ali used to have one hand chopped off in such cases as were suspicious—I was going to say on proof of malingering. But so much good evidence would be unnecessary, and in a manner thrown away, under Turkish rule. I think a Jew must look with great satisfaction upon the present condition of the Egyptians. Their worst enemy could not wish them to be more deeply degraded—or to look it (of much consequence in a revengeful point of view) more completely.

Breakfast over in the great stone Hôtel d'Orient, with its flagged and echoing corridors, and cell-like bedrooms, we decided on a leisurely stroll—on donkeys, of course—through the city. Eastern cities, we may remark, are, from their curiously primitive uncleanliness, not so much adapted for walking about as the hardy traveller might imagine. It is well to have the stilts of the patient quadruped between you and harm. The bazaars were great and true delights to us fresh *outremer* wayfarers. The numberless stalls; the heaps of grain—sesame, no doubt, had its place; the calm dignity of the stall-keepers; the various small trades, carried on as they doubtless were in the time of—whom shall we say?—well, Rameses—only, as they were chiefly Turks, perhaps Soliman the First would be more correctly instructive. The unowned, and apparently unfed, dogs made it a point of honour to rival the muezzins in wailing howls. The veiled Egyptian women, with their disfiguring face-protectors,—we did not

notice any whose faces would have made much commotion if unconcealed. We congratulated ourselves that the plague was not in full blast. It often is in Egypt, and when one notes the habits of the people one ceases to wonder. An ill-fated countryman of mine, a few years before my trip, had his run home abruptly cut short there. When he heard from the doctor that he must die, his agony was great. Young, strong, vigorous but the day before—enamoured of the fair present—regarding the future as a storehouse of pleasures yet untried—how terrible to a man like *him* was the summons, so dread to all. He turned his face to the wall. 'My God! that I should die now! I—to die! My poor mother!' He died next day.

CHAPTER V

I LOOKED out with all my eyes for the Arab steed of the poets, but I am constrained to say that I did not find him. Here and there was a handsome horse enough, with high crest and croup, ridden by the slave of a Turkish swell. But the riding horses more resembled the Persian breed. They had not the wiry high-caste undeniable look of the desert Arab. I fancy few first-class Arabs are brought into Egypt. Their owners have a well-grounded fear of being found in any city handy to prisons and places of detention, there being recorded against most of their names 'accidents and offences' which would justify a Turkish official in laying them by the heels, more especially if well mounted. The merchants and civilians generally

seemed quite satisfied with the handsome white asses upon which, lounging on capacious red saddles, they ambled along in luxurious style. These were really beautiful animals for donkeys—quite the aristocracy of the race, if such there be ; standing well up to fourteen hands, and, as I said before, sweetly pretty in their way.

The Nile at Cairo is not a romantic stream. It runs between low banks of alluvium, and doubtless had extensive reed-beds in old days—before the frontage was so extensively 'free selected.' Every yard of the well-irrigated soil supports its crop, and nothing can exceed the luxuriance of the general growth. Cotton has been largely encouraged by the present Pacha ; we saw the ripening pods over a considerable area. All pointed to the support of a dense population, even though the subdivision of the land has rendered the average of the produce barely sufficient to sustain life.

Circumstances, and the inopportune presence of the *Massilia* at Alexandria a little earlier than usual, compelled us to leave dear delightful Cairo a day earlier than we intended. So we packed, 'bussed, and were again railing over the desert. It was late when we left, and the moon shed a flood of light over all things as we crossed the Nile. The day had been unusually hot. It seemed as if night in this burning clime was the natural season for travel, for pleasant gatherings, for all kinds of socialities repressed by the relentless god of day. Crowds of people were travelling—on foot, on camels, mules, or asses—along the line of route that ran parallel to the railway. We passed through a regiment, whose bivouac extended far on either side. We saw many a Holy Family, or their exact models, by the wayside ; the man leading an ass, upon which was a woman holding a babe. All these forms and groups

passed away, or soon lay far behind us, as we cleared the suburbs, turned our backs to the great river gleaming and eddying in the moonlight, and buried ourselves in the wide lifeless desert. A short stay at Kafr Zayat—ten minutes allowed for refreshments—stewed camel, or something nearly as tough, with small cups of strong pure coffee—then more desert—troubled sleep—lights—dogs—noisy porters, and we are in Alexandria. Being gradually resolved out of chaos into the Hôtel d'Europe, we find ourselves disinclined for sleep, or supper; yet hoping for any valid excuse for staying up. I remained long on the balcony listening to the muezzins, with their high-pitched long-drawn chants, and to the watchmen, who were the opposition vocalists. At that hour it was exciting and novel to be in the city of Hypatia; to fancy the populace eager for the gladiator show of the morrow—the savage monks, the licentious prefect (Pacha of the period), and the Goths whose swords were so soon to avenge the high-souled daughter of the Old World creeds.

At sunrise we were all in the city, having to be on board at eight o'clock. We thought it necessary to visit the Consul to have our passports viséd. Matters were strict in that way, and we did not wish to expose ourselves to the risk of being sent ignominiously back from Marseilles. The hour was early for an official visit. The Consul slept, the servant declared that he could not be disturbed; whereupon our native, raising his voice, swore that one of the party was the son of the Governor-General of India, and that the whole Eastern question would be complicated if we were not instantly attended to. Whether this announcement had the desired effect we had no means of knowing, but the Consul came down in light raiment, and civilly did our business.

We drove to the *Massilia* a little before the regular time.

The early passenger gets the cabin. We had besides a glimpse of the Pacha's palace, by the sea, in a glory of gardens. The Cairo gossip is that he has 120 wives. He would appear to be settled in life.

We were charmed with the look of the *Massilia*. We were coming into the land (or sea) of high art as applied to steamers. The decorative standard was raised. The saloon was artistically and delicately painted in light green and gold, with glass panels of cerulean blue, upon which sylphs and nymphs disported themselves. The boat was airy, commodious, and exquisitely clean. Our cabin is perhaps *rather* full, having four tenants, but we are all friends and can therefore exercise that forbearance which renders crowding endurable. Chaffham abstains from throwing his boots about—I get up very early—Mackenzie very late. So we do not clash in the bath and dressing arrangements. Our stout friend is bound over not to snore. We have yet another infusion of passengers —and this, by the way, though subject to mishap, is one of the features of the P. and O. route, in which it so excels the long sea captivity, with its unchangeable companions. Instead of having to sit the month through beside some one you hate, opposite to some one that hates you, you have in the pleasant steamers of the great company all the liberty of social action, all the graduated congeniality of a club. Then, as every fresh batch of passengers joins the party, you have the possibilities, sometimes the triumphs, of the unexpected. Our newly arrived were from many lands, having made Alexandria a kind of depôt after their wanderings; one young officer presented himself in a fez, declaring he hadn't time to get a Christian hat; a large propor-

tion were Mauritius creoles—the girls of which party were pretty little creatures, singing droll negro songs, and full of French gaiety. With fair weather and a fast boat it was not long before we saw the frowning fortress of Malta. With small delay our baggage was extracted, and we stood upon the historic 'Nix Mangiare stairs.'

The *Panther*, a brisk, impatient-looking little steamer, which had obligingly got up her steam in readiness to tear off to Marseilles with the passengers of the *Massilia*, was baulked of her destiny as far as we three were concerned—Mackenzie, Chaffham, and I—for we sternly resolved to see Malta in a decent, leisurely fashion, and go on by the next boat. The authorities were obliging enough to humour our whim, and having had our tickets endorsed, we possessed ourselves of our luggage, and stood on the well-known stairs, recalling Master Midshipman Easy. We had not time to indulge these recollections for many moments before our luggage was in the hands of the porters, and ourselves in the power of a commissionaire *en route* for 'Dunsford's.' Passing through a regular drawbridge, overlooked by tremendous fortifications and guarded by sentries, we found ourselves in a narrow street, flanked by tall houses, with overhanging balconies and casements, gaily painted and looking much like the head of a stage scene, with the curtain up. We felt inclined to shout aloud at the sudden picturesque look of the whole thing, like children at a pantomime. The crowd was sufficiently foreign and various of aspect. Women with the graceful bearing and draped mantilla of old Spain; sombre-robed, broad-hatted padres; high-wheeled, long-shafted carts, drawn by mules up the steep, clean, narrow street; water-carriers; fruit-sellers — all was deliciously novel. We found our inn a stone-walled

palace, with the busy Strada Reale in front, and a large fruit garden under our bedroom windows, which told of a sunny land. We order baths and other pre-prandial comforts for the evening, and procuring a carriage, set forth to see all that is to be seen with energetic interest.

First, to the Governor's palace, a venerable edifice, built by one of the Grand Masters. We roamed through the armoury, and saw De Beaumanoir, L'Isle Adam, and other 'past' Grand Masters of the once mighty order of the Knights of Malta.

Grim effigies in full armour, the blazon of whose shields the infidel well knew, from whose corslets had rattled many a flight of arrows. We were shown curious relics of the old wars with the Turk; the marble tombs of long-dead knights; many wonders and glories at the chapel. We went down into St. Paul's Cave, above which it is built. Chaffham asks what St. Paul wanted with the cave. Is told by the monk that he spent three weeks there *en pénitence*, and built the chapel afterwards. Chaffham makes a note — 'was not aware of it before.' There were pictures, statues, and an altar, lovely with lapis lazuli.

Thence to the old town, past Moorish-looking houses with courtyards, over the lofty walls of which orange and olive trees straggled; past fountains with stone troughs, where mules were drinking and country people gossiping; past the lofty pillars of an aqueduct, built by one of those demigods, for good or evil, the Grand Masters. We halted at a magnificent newly-built church. How new and fresh the delicately-coloured freestone looked! The Maltese have much skill in masonry—the profusion of material, the whole island being a vast quarry, leading to excellence in that direction. For centuries the architecture of Malta

has been ornate and imposing—a legacy from their Moorish conquerors. The aisle was under an exquisitely finished dome, to the top of which we ascended by a spiral stair. We were politely invited to go on the outside of the dome, where, clinging to an iron chain, we sat and looked over the island's busy hive and the deep blue Mediterranean. We felt like ants as we gazed at the flies, which we knew to be our fellow-creatures, below, and at the first hint of giddiness descended. And so home—past fields and vineyards, past oxen treading out the corn, as in the Old Testament days, and veritable watch-towers as then, and once more the old town with its moat and drawbridge.

We had taken in quite as many wonders and memories as were prudent for one day's collection, when we returned brimful of knowledge yet mildly interested about dinner. My bedroom led into a smaller apartment, where was a famous stone bath with porcelain sides.

The dust of Malta is plentiful and penetrative, yet I think we descended to the *table d'hôte* indifferently well purified. A jolly old military officer and his friend joined our party. In the friend I found a gentleman whom I had met in Australia a year or two before. Our evening was rendered additionally pleasant by this incident, and after dinner we turned out and went to the fashionable promenade on the ramparts. There we looked over iron railings and fosses of awful depth; saw the ancient towers and batteries, which had awed the Moslem centuries ago. Trees were planted in earth placed in holes scooped out of the rock, and kept green and shade-affording by daily watering. Below and around were the calm waters of the azure sea.

While on the ramparts we were slightly surprised by observing a tablet to the memory of a member of

an old Maltese family of Italian descent, Lieutenant Scheberas, an officer of the line, who had died, as was recorded, at 'West Maitland.' I certainly did not expect to see a 'legended tomb' with reference to Australia then and there.

Leaving the breezy ramparts, we strolled along the romantic road, which, beautifully designed and neatly kept, follows the line of the harbour. A few horsemen, rather short of exercise ground, more carriages, with maidens in balconies, were the aggregate of our gains in the observation department. We looked in at the theatre, but our Italian proving scarcely good enough to enable us to enjoy the general action of the play, we left it for the café, where there were matters which we *could* understand—ices, notably—and this being the concluding act of our entertainment, we gave in, and with Mr. Pepys 'so to bed.'

CHAPTER VI

NOT to have visited the Church of St. John's would have covered us with merited ignominy, though Chaffham did say 'he'd seen so many churches.' The floor is composed of the marble tombstones of the Knights of Malta; from simple knights to the heads of the order. You stand perchance upon the slab which covers the bones of De Rohan or Bois Guilbert, and mark the lineage and blazonry of the warrior who lies below, with a date centuries old,—

Their swords are rust,
Their bones are dust,
Their souls are with the saints, we trust.

The effect of the music, of the unpremeditated service is deeply impressive. One by one steals quietly in, the wearer of a heart worn with the world's cares, heavy with sorrow, laden with guilt. The penitent throws himself upon his knees. At the solemn chant of the choir, every head droops in solemn abasement and humility. Again the music swells. A deep measured half chant, half recitative comes from the unseen choir. 'Rest, troubled heart (it seems to say); faith alone can save; here only is peace; repent, pour out thy soul, sin no more.' Then streams out the wild wistful chorus; the humble, the proud, the penitent, the desperate all mingling in the half ecstasy, half agony of the wondrous 'Miserere.'

One is not surprised at the resistless power of the Church of Rome. In Catholic countries, you steal into the cathedrals—those vast temples *never closed* to the worshippers—out of the busy street and noontide glare. 'The dim religious light,' the manifold altars, the unconscious group of fellow-worshippers, all invite to abstraction and devotion. The burden is for a while laid down, the knee is bent, and after a short interval of earnest prayer, the world's wayfarer resumes the dusty march, who shall say how lightened in spirit, how soothed, how supported! The cheerful populous little island is said to contain 120,000 inhabitants. The lower classes are a fine athletic-looking people, more like dark-coloured Britons than any other human variety. The community of characteristics which marks a Celtic race (and I suppose Malta to have been originally more Iberian than of any other root) is curiously illustrated by the extraordinary Irish look of the common people. Mackenzie and I picked out face after face which one would have sworn must have come from the south or west of Ireland. The man who

drove us looked as if he couldn't have any other name than Tim Regan or Pat Murphy. It was strange to hear the Italian-sounding patois from those very Hibernian-looking lips.

As to race, the Carthaginian, the Roman, the Greek, the Goth, the Moor, the Norman, the Gaul, the Briton have all won and worn the island keep by turns since the fifth century. If fusion of blood be a good thing, the Maltese have eminently enjoyed it.

We had time to visit 'St. Paul's Bay,' about seven miles from Valetta. The day was glorious, and, as we stopped at a quiet little *trattoria* by the roadside, and sat looking at the sea, nothing could have exceeded it as a picture of still summer beauty. The blue waveless water, the strange foreign buildings, the noonday silence, our dreamy speculations as to where St. Paul's vessel was stranded, and general acknowledgment of a sand-spit which divided the bay, as 'the place where two seas met,' I shall long remember. On our return to the hotel, we learnt that the *Vectis* had come in, so we compressed our emotions into a valedictory dinner, and went on board by moonlight, buying a basket or two of the famous Maltese oranges from the girls on Nix Mangiare stairs, as a souvenir.

The *Vectis* was a soundly built, sea-worthy little boat as ever faced a mistral, and she had every good quality in a gale but one. 'Such a dry beast,' as the sardonic second officer observed. When we did stand up to that mistral which swooped down like a white squall upon us in the Gulf of Lyons, we were in the condition of the young lady at the ball, and 'hadn't a dry thread on us.' It had been a winter of unusual severity, and many were the tales we heard of the season's skirmishes. However, in spite of wet decks and gloomy days, we sighted first Toulon, then the

legendary towers of the Château d'If, and finally ran into the harbour of Marseilles.

We had small delay from the dreaded *douanier*. Ours was a person of tact and good breeding. He asked if we had any contraband articles in our trunks. We answered, 'No, save a little Maltese lace for presents.' He placed his hand upon his heart, shrugged his shoulders, and passed them at once. Colonel Newcome answered, '*Oui, oui*,' to all questions, and was told by a mischievous young subaltern that he had confessed thereby to serious breaches of the Customs law, and that the officer had gone to fetch *gens d'armes* to arrest the whole party.

However, in the interim, our luggage was tossed on to a small mountain of trunks, and thence piled upon the top of an immense omnibus drawn by four gray Normandy stallions. Fine horses these in their way. They were about the size of our Suffolk punches, scarcely so heavy, with neat heads, high crests, and clean fat legs. They trotted fairly enough; for all service about a farm a more useful stamp of horse could not be, and our driver turned into the archway of the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs after a fashion which showed us that there were other people in the world who could handle four horses besides the privileged Anglo-Saxon. Being informed that the train did not leave for Paris before five in the afternoon, we dashed into street society at once.

Our first admiration was the fine effect of the rows of beautiful trees which lined the streets and suburban roads. Carefully tended they were, uniform in their growth to a branch, and benignantly umbrageous. As the people in groups paced beneath them, or sat on chairs or benches, secure from the rays of the sun of the south, I thought how easily such an example might

be followed in the fast-springing towns and cities of Australia.[1] We rambled about with tireless interest until it was time to prepare for our four-and-twenty hours' journey to Paris, and at five precisely — for *very* punctual are the French trains, especially on this, which is rather a model line—we were spinning along at a very high rate of speed in the mail train for Paris.

Our time had been short for making notes, but we saw enough to give us an idea of *la petite culture* both before and after we left Marseilles. It was strange to our Australian eyes. The whole country was, as far as we could see, an exaggerated market garden. No fences wasted the ground, the live stock were few and odd-looking. A small cow here and there fed contentedly on the tether—woods there were none—timber was scarce as in the Hebrides, save the monotonous lines of solemn, unsightly, lopped poplars.

According to English ideas, no one appeared to have land enough for a farm. The peasant *proprietaire* has the satisfaction of believing himself to be the owner of *sa terre*, minus the interest and principal of the invariable mortgage. He produces all that he consumes—but he consumes all that he produces. He makes his own sour wine, his own rough boots, even his clothes. He works like a slave, practising the most rigid self-denial. His wife and children are little else than beasts of burden, while the whole rural population is steeped in ignorance. He rejects the alternative of emigration, unlike the stronger-souled Gothic races, and cumbers the crowded soil with a population which but serves to swell the army of a monarchy or a republic. On the other side of the picture, it must be confessed that he is orderly, temperate, economical, and

[1] *N.B.*—The practice in Australia is now almost universal.

cheerful to a degree which excites the astonishment of all who behold his mode of life.

We crossed the 'arrowy Rhone,' and had no remarkable adventure until about mid-day we halted at Dijon. Here befell the event!—so unusual, so improbable, so all but impossible in the annals of railway travelling (as looked upon by the light of our previous experiences), that I propose to describe it with somewhat of the careful accuracy which its rarity and importance demand.

The adventure—the event—was a *dinner*, and 'a wery uncommon and particlar one it was,' like Mr. Weller's new suit of clothes. How shall I do justice to the delicacy, the celerity, the freshness, the warmth, the variety, the sufficiency, the artistic finish of that peerless, unforgotten banquet? '*Vingt minutes d'arrêt!*' were the sounds that greeted us as we stepped forth resignedly, with chastened thoughts of a little pilgrim-like partaking by the wayside. We were civilly ushered into a *salon*, where, as we sat down at the delicately apparelled table, delicious soup was set before each traveller without a second's delay. This finished, the different courses, all in separate portions, succeeded one another with the speed and perfection of a fairy feast, when invisible hands replaced the dishes for the benighted prince. A pint of excellent *vin ordinaire* stood by each plate, and before the quarter of an hour had fully struck, every man and woman of this large party had dined in a leisurely and luxurious way. The *entente cordiale* was complete. We rose from our seats and strolled up and down the platform, lost in feelings of international love and admiration. When we regained our carriages, there was a perfect chorus of applause and gratitude, coupled with reminiscences (and revilings) of 'Mugby Junction.'

At about the same hour which had seen us quitting Marseilles, we arrived at the gate of Paris, where we again had no difficulty with our placable Customs officials. We were placed in other omnibuses of the exact pattern, in size, driver, Norman gray horses and all, of those which had carried us at Marseilles. By the way, while on the subject of draught, we were much surprised while at Marseilles by the mule teams, chiefly employed in connection with military service. Never did our eye light on such grand animals—for mules. Of the size of ordinary draught-horses, they had legs like Clydesdales. It was only by the narrow hip and elongated ears that one could distinguish them from good-sized cart-horses. They are chiefly derived from Poitou.

Having elected to stay at the Hôtel de Louvre, we were presently unpacked in the lofty-roofed court-yard, wherein vehicles are depositing the luggage of families, and others, all day and all night, from north and south, from tidal trains, from the uttermost parts of the earth—so unceasing is the stream of travellers destined to abide for awhile in that vast gilded palace.

We were conducted into a city of bedrooms, where, after traversing the Rue Rivoli and the Rue Honoré, the name of 'our street' and the number of our habitation were impressed upon us, and we were left to find our way back out of the labyrinth as we might. As there are more than four hundred bedrooms, it is a necessity to name the corridors and passages, as well as to number the rooms. As it is, unprotected strangers, unacquainted with the national tongue, were often met roaming about the lanes and thoroughfares of the City of Sleepers, muttering their address in strange accents, and grasping an ineffectual key.

After an introduction to the spacious bathrooms,

where, with the aid of hot water and the mighty *peignoirs* of the land, we managed to recruit our way-worn frames, we hasted to the 'Trois Frères Provençaux,' at which traditionary café we dined—the dinner of Dijon notwithstanding. Being travellers and 'toilers of the sea' but of yesterday, we permitted ourselves privileges.

We fully realised the charm of the entertainment, and it did not occur to any of us to declare that the 'whole thing had been awfully over-praised.' We feasted and drank and were thankful. Of course the rooms were spacious, gay with gilding, glittering with mirrors. At the many marble tables sat parties of cheerful natives, or (as in our case) joyous strangers, with an almost equal mixture of the sexes. This was new to us English-customed Australians. It was pleasant in appearance; but though one may recognise the value of the assumption that the ladies of one's household may join in our festive hours, yet I do not relinquish my inherited British prejudice, that for many reasons, and in many cases, 'women are best at home.'

CHAPTER VII

ON the next day after breakfast we commenced to see and to do Paris in proper form. We procured a carriage and a commissionaire—the latter a most useful, if not indispensable, appendage to strangers. Ours was a brisk, alert little fellow, Irish by birth or extraction, but fluent and well read in the language and life of the French capital. I think we commenced with 'Nôtre Dame,' where we heard a fragment of

mass, and thought of poor Esmeralda, Quasimodo, and the enmeshed ecclesiastic. Paris is, *par excellence*, the city of the stranger. In no other does he so readily find a home, and have all things made so easy and agreeable for him. Everything—the tendency to pleasantness of act and speech, the unfailing politeness, the good feeling, one may say, of every class, even to the humblest, the mildness of the climate, the bright, festive air of the people and their habitations,—all conduce to an airiness of exhilaration which one misses in the receptive hospitality of other cities. One braces up one's nerves, as for the conflict, in the land of the surly Teuton or the cold Englishman. In the home of the genial Gaul, gay, polished, delicate of mien, the feeling is rarely absent—in the street, in the park, in the hotel—that you are a cherished guest, a valued visitor. *Monsieur le gen d'arme* 'impresses himself' to put you in the right way; he walks half the length of the street with you; he suggests that if '*Monsieur l'Anglais* would give himself the pain to go here, or turn himself there, he will find what he seeks.' Mademoiselle who sells him his gloves, the bootmaker, the confectioner, the printseller, is equally tolerant of his grammar and anxious for his welfare. It may be that the reverse side of his shield, with greater leisure to note, or lack of coin, might occasionally present itself. I believe that the intervals of that ominous gleam are rare, and chiefly due to the stranger knight's indolence or obtuseness. Poor, pretty, soiled, and war-worn Paris, how changed a lot has been thine since that day! How dimmed thy splendours and down-trodden thy vines and bocages—'O, pleasant land of France!'

Without delivering ourselves over to drudgery and guide-books, we saw most of the necessary wonders. We roamed through the galleries of the Louvre, to the

weariness of our limbs, the stiffening of our necks, and doubtless the great enlargement and improvement of our minds. The Madeleine, the Morgue, the Bois de Boulogne, the Palais Royal, the Museum, the Catacombs were all 'seen and approved' by the wandering barbarians from the South. After such a day, after having dined, as was our custom, together, we were unanimous in a desire to see Mabille—'just to go once, you know.'

We found much the same kind of thing which we expected: gardens, pagodas, music, the inevitable café-tables, without which no Parisian populace could fully enjoy itself, with the usual crowd of careless pleasure-seekers. The music was unusually good; the dancing had just commenced, so we applied ourselves to witness the celebrated *Can-can* with a thrill of conscious impropriety. Certainly there is a strongly-marked national difference in the measure of enjoyment which Britons and Frenchmen derive from personal experience of the joyous dance. An Englishman always dances, when out of the pale of strict propriety, as if he were thoroughly ashamed of himself. He has not the adequate virtue which would compel him to refrain; as little has he the total absence of moral sentiment which would permit him to revel in full and heedless enjoyment.

Not so is it with the lively Gaul. The music is *very* good, certainly, and possesses a fire and finish in which our entertainments of a like nature are wanting. At the first burst of the enlivening strains, at the melodious crash with which the first figure of the grand quadrille commences, observe Jules and Henri. They reck not of homily or creed, of morals or of manners, save those which tradition has long cherished as sacred to the *pays de Bohême*. At the

first note, how each student bounds to meet the eager grisette, who, with sparkling eyes and excited mien, dashes forth, impetuous and provocative, to meet him. The men leap and gesticulate, sending their feet on high, after a fashion which astonishes us sober Britishers. The women pirouette, fly, and tear round the room in mad whirls and airy gambols, which suggest the 'forest maiden dancing bare before an olden shrine.' Towards the close of the evening the fun became more fast and furious; the Mænads occasionally raised the encumbering drapery higher than was consistent with latter-day propriety, or even classic grace. The lithe, dark youngsters pushed their hats farther back on their heads, capered more extensively, and flourished their attenuated limbs at more desperate altitudes than ever. But they seemed to care more for the real physical enjoyment and abandon of the dance than aught else. Our robust British or provincial virtue was not perceptibly injured. There are worse things than the *Can-can*, and blacker demons than the *diablotins* of that name.

Mackenzie and I remained in the 'pleasant city' until we were tolerably acquainted with Parisian life, at least with such limited portion thereof as strangers could hope to attain. We became competent to buy gloves and order dinners without drawing too heavily upon the praiseworthy toleration in which all French people so immensely surpass our compatriots. We sought out recondite cafés, wherein we lunched, contrasting amusedly the modest tariff with the somewhat warlike prices of the Hôtel de Louvre. We sauntered into the Bois de Boulogne and watched the equipages, for the most part sufficiently correct and imposing; also the cavaliers, whose horsemanship was more open to criticism.

We frequented theatres, and were tolerably regular at the Opéra Comique, where we successively fell in love with Judith Ferraris and commenced to appreciate the finer humour of the pieces, and the occasionally outspoken comments of the gentlemen of the press.

We roamed through the gardens of the Tuileries, and took the greatest interest in watching the occasional drill of the Zouaves in the courtyard of the Palace. We witnessed our compatriot, 'Arry Belville,' landing himself in a slight difficulty there one day, as we looked on. He had heard, evidently, that many of the Zouaves were men of other nations—Irishmen, Greeks, Poles, and what not—so, willing to air his French, he thus addressed a stout bourgeois standing by, '*Esker, Mossoo, esker que ces gens-là sont toutes Françaises?*' The Frenchman turned as if he had struck him, and glaring at the unfortunate 'Arry,' hissed out, '*Monsieur—r—r! vous êtes—vous êtes—Anglais!*' and bringing out this comprehensive epithet with the most sardonic emphasis, he smiled grimly and departed, leaving 'Arry' much confused as to the cause of this outburst, and shaken as to his previous convictions of the uniform politeness of Frenchmen.

And the gardens of Armida! that mystic and charmed realm, haunted by memories of past splendours, of shadowy kings and their favourites, nobles and courtiers, warriors and diplomatists, beauties regnant, deposed, or forsaken. O enchanted Palace of Versailles, how we surrendered ourselves to thy witching influences! In the long glowing afternoons, how we lay by thy fountains, or gazed down the glorious vista which discloses a view scarce equalled in the world! There 'La Vallière' came to us with sweet, sad, self-reproachful gaze, winning our readiest sympathy. There paced Louis the Well-Beloved, walking delicately

in the well-grounded assurance that every hair in his most elaborate periwig was dear to thirty millions of Frenchmen. How vast the elevation! How awful the responsibility!

But Paris is not, after all, the *locale* best suited to a healthy balance of the faculties. And that Anglo-Saxon who remains within her gates, after a due season of rest and entertainment, is apt to suffer moral deterioration; apt to become a lounger, a sensualist, a trifler; apt to drift and sink into that aimless, flaccid, contemptible being, a continental Englishman.

Thus we talked to one another, Mackenzie and I, as we agreed that the time had arrived to make an end of the Parisian life, and betake ourselves to the sterner surroundings of the Parent Isle. Surmounting with a slight effort the disinclination to leave the Castle of Indolence, the battlements of which were now more plainly visible as we were donning our armour, we packed our portmanteaux and gave notice to the management of the hotel of our approaching departure.

Again the barrier, the railway—the sandy tracts that lie between us and the sea—and we are on board of the crowded steamer destined to bear us to the land of our forefathers.

We possess the privileges conferred by our late voyaging, and look with an air of superiority upon our less-hardened compatriots, who are visibly fluttered as the breeze increases. Soon I am aware by the sufferings of my fellow-creatures (as Chawles says in the *Yellowplush Papers*) 'what basans was ment for.' By the bye, the great author of *Vanity Fair* did us the honour to cross in our company. It needed not that he should be pointed out to me. The white hair, the well-known countenance, the tall, stout figure had been correctly set forth in his portraits. He had been to

Paris, a place he loved, for change of air—as it proved for the last time. I little thought that in the following year the great modern satirist would himself be the subject of the Club notice, to which, in one of the papers, he feelingly adverts—'Member deceased.'

'What are those white-looking rocks or things near the land?' Mackenzie asks. 'O careless reader of the Goldsmith of your youth,' I answer, 'these be the landmarks for which the galleys of Saxon and Norman and Dane and Norseman have been steered in the old days, "before all the good country was taken up." William the Conqueror (if his own sailing master) ejaculated, when he saw them shining fair through the eternal fog, "*Splendeur de Dieu!* keep her full and by," or words to that effect; Lodbrog the Dane declared that, the voyage being virtually over, he should never be reduced to such straits in the way of nether garments again; while Blondel broke forth involuntarily, as he returned from the Holy Land with Song Roy, into "When Johnny comes marching home." Unworthy descendant of sea-kings, and all sorts of ancient British, Celtic, Roman, Danish, Saxon, Pictish, Scottish, and Norman swells—yonder are the chalk cliffs of Albion!'

As I reel off this rubbish, Mackenzie questions my sanity, and even the wan passengers smile after a feeble fashion. But I am not so mirthfully moved as might appear, and something unaccustomed stirs my heart and rises in my bosom as my eyes rest for the first time on the ancestral wonder-isle.

Landed, and speeding away for London, how one seems to have journeyed by that narrow strait into another world! How different, how diametrically opposite, are all things on the hither side of the tiny strip of salt water. The men, the houses, the hedges, the fields, no longer fenceless, the noble umbrageous

trees, the broad-backed sheep and cattle—all these, together with the grayer sky, write in large characters the legend of 'Merrie England.' Nowhere can you look without seeing evidences of wealth, of comfort, of neatness, and that deference to the effect of the landscape in the matter of timber which proves how largely profit is sacrificed to taste. It almost appears as though we had scarcely time for more than these passing reflections when, the sky having become more murky, the houses more dense, the general sense of approaching the heart of a vast city more fixed and acute, our train, that 'modern marvel' of speed, comfort, strength, and punctuality, rolls smoothly into the Metropolitan Station, to the exact minute of its appointed time. Mackenzie and I take a concentrated farewell, and depart on yet further journeyings, he to catch the night train for Edinburgh, and I to my uncle's hospitable seat in the green levels of Hampshire. That night I find myself in the old-fashioned, massive manor-house, the walls, rooms, and every nook and corner of which I seem to have known from childhood.

I *have* known it almost as well as these inmates, whose warm greeting I had but faintly anticipated, and who had been born beneath its ancient roof.

How many a time had my father, at my earnest request, told me tales involving the most minute details of his old home. I knew where the great ash tree grew, and the end of the hall gable where the jackdaws built. How fervently I used to wish that there had been jackdaws in Australia, and how I refused to console myself with the martins that built in our wide verandah, and whose clay nests I could pull down without danger or disapproval. There was no fun in that. I knew where the gooseberry bushes were, next to the apple-tree walk, and how all the old fruit-

trees had paving-stones underneath them to keep the roots from striking too deeply. I knew what Royal personages dwelt in the hall centuries ago, for it had been the home of a princess. I knew exactly where the old old village church stood, and whose tombs and monumental brasses lay therein. I knew how curiously close was the churchyard, and indeed an ancestor of strong inquisitive tendencies had been very generally accused of cribbing a certain portion of that final 'Reserve.' In short, I had been so eagerly interested in the details, and so effectively coached, that my cousins said I must have come home in disguise and worked up the subject, or I *never* could have known half the things I did.

'Don't tell me,' said my cousin Gwendoline next morning (a merry damsel with profuse fair hair and wonderful hazel eyes), 'it's not credible; you *must* have been here, if not in bodily presence (and there *was* a great ill-looking man prowling about the grounds last year—just about Rolf's height, too—wasn't there, papa?), in the spirit. Perhaps you people in Australia are warlocks, or sorcerers, who knows? Isn't there a place in Sydney called "Isle of Demons"? That must be the explanation; and you all have the second sight like Highlanders, and see visions, and that's how you have seen Boldrewood Chase, no doubt.'

'There's one thing I should like to know about Australia, Rolf,' said my jolly old uncle, with a roguish twinkle in his eye, 'whether the Australian girls, owing to the heat of the climate or other causes, have quite such nimble tongues as——'

Here his mouth was stopped in a fashion which prevented the enunciation of heresies, and we applied ourselves to the various loveliness of a country breakfast, previously in danger of being disregarded.

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT a delicious feeling had pervaded one on awakening! The view from the old Chamberlain's Room, now my bedchamber (that ever I should have lived to sleep in it seemed an act of the 'art magic' of which my cousin talked), was not perhaps very extensive, but thoroughly English, and full of characteristic loveliness. The season was early autumn. I ought to have been over earlier. But Paris, Paris, how many good resolutions hast thou not smiled at! Besides, it was well to improve in French, and strengthen one's slight accomplishments, sketching, music, and the like, before hasting to the ordeal, occasionally searching to colonists, of English society. So the long dreamy midsummer days had passed. The fields were still tenderly green of hue. The woods and coppices were full-leaved, and the sloping sun-rays had strength enough to win respect from the stranger, who had felt his wrath in the far South Land. But the year had turned, and there was ever and anon a warning chilliness in the evening breeze—a gathering sigh amid the woods where as yet no leaf had fallen!

'How happily the days of Thalaba went by!' The quiet luxuriousness of the life was utterly perfect. My fair cousins Gwendoline and Adelgitha were great walkers, and I was never tired of making raids and excursions to every mill, farm-house, ruin, cottage, or castle within reasonable distance. They were famous 'cicerones'—well read, high-spirited, full of local, and

a trifle of archæological lore. True English country girls—wholesome in mind as in body—pure, warm-hearted, cultured, refined. Lives there on the earth's surface a sweeter type of womanhood?

I was never tired of watching and talking to the farm labourers. I made myself acquainted with all their habits and customs. Their wages, their hours of labour, their food in quantity and quality, their cottages and gardens—all these parts of village life I carefully studied. From my bronzed and bearded appearance I was generally taken for a gentleman from foreign parts—whether from India, America, China, or Continental Europe the incurious peasantry did not know, or indeed greatly care. Cousin Gwen used to introduce me as a gentleman from Australia, and ask them whether they would like to emigrate. I was cross-questioned as to rates of wages; that the master should supply all needful food as well as house-room they never could be made to comprehend. Indeed, they heard the comparatively grand story with a certain reserve as to credence. I did not always come off with a compliment. Gwendoline said one day to an old woman, 'Now, Margery, here's a gentleman who has been all his life in Australia, and he says he likes it as well as England.' 'Lor', miss, do 'e now, you don't say so. Well' (reflectively but decisively), 'maybe he don't know no better!'

The grand underlying characteristics of English country life, as displayed before me in that pleasant sojourn, seemed to be repose and security. Every one appeared tolerably certain of his lifelong occupation or position. The miller had inherited his mill with the aged massive water-wheel and the picturesque old cottage with the flower-twined porch. Or he had a very long lease of it. His trade was regular, not very

progressive perhaps, but as little inclined to retrograde. There was no incongruous haste or bustle, no anxiety to cut down the trade of a rival mill. But the carts with their sacks of corn came as regularly as those which received the sacks of flour, all were laden or unladen without the slightest apparent irregularity or hurry. The miller smoked his pipe of afternoons upon the bench under the great elm; his wife sewed at the open casement; and his pretty daughter tripped to and from the village, or moved among the flowers, bees, and poultry. All things seemed as fixed and unalterably prosperous, within their stated limits, as the brook which had rippled under such shady alders since the heptarchy, and still 'flowed on for ever.' So with the farmer, the squire, the parson, the labourer. Small wonder that those who can hold their ground elect to remain in the Mother Isle, amid the 'happy breed of men,' where they were born. But the hive, when full, must swarm; and how sweet-blossomed soever be the orchard, the swarm, when once on the wing, for the most part finds a distant Hybla. The miller's youngest son must needs seek his fortune; the squire's second must fight his country's foes wherever the Horse Guards decide, from 'India to the Pole.' The next one joins his schoolfellow, the parson's scapegrace son, and with their modest capital and the old Norse recklessness, which comes well out as soon as they have fairly cut the painter, they set up for themselves at Bunderabulla Crossing-place, the Red River, or snow-capped Hokanui. So arises the germ of a fresh *polis*, as like in all essential facts, tendency, and social laws to the parent land as if only a county, instead of a continent and an ocean, divided them. And though plenty should arise and riches multiply in the great new land, it is always well for the children to look back to the fair green

fields, the 'untitled nobility,' and the equal laws of the great motherland.

It seems hard to realise that out of this quiet dreamful country life, where action so rarely jostles contemplation, such a man as Cromwell should arise, almost more wonderful than the fashioning of a Hampden.

Ruling his paternal acres, and the neighbouring village, scarce known by neighbours for more than a man whose nature impelled him to love justice, whose brain necessitated correctness of decision, and whose heart forbade submission to wrong, John Hampden by one act, by one unalterable declaration, rises to the rank of the patriot, the statesman, the hero-leader. The calm delights of his country home are lost to him for ever. In their place he is compelled to accept the stern joys of the battle, to earn 'a name and fame above the blight of earthly breath,' deathless in the memory of his race, for ever illustrious in those far lands, to him unknown, which the English language and literature have since pervaded.

I made close search into the justice of an assertion which is so frequently heard in Australia—'You should see the day's work that an English labourer does—men don't work, or won't work half as hard in the colonies.' I found this opinion, like many others which are thoughtlessly paraded, and which presuppose an inferiority in all colonial, as contrasted with English performances, to be utterly unfounded. The English labourer certainly does work very long hours. He is steady, persistent, and stubbornly true, as the oxen which he drives. But like them he is slow, incapable of change of direction, and altogether wanting in the capacity of sustaining muscular exertion at high pressure. How can it be otherwise? Broad may be the frame, mighty be the

thews and sinews, as becomes a race of hereditary labourers, after a thousand years' residence in the most equable and bracing climate in the world. But the 'hard condition' is wanting. The full supply of animal food, which he, of all men, most enjoys, most requires, he cannot obtain. He has therefore to subsist upon a diet chiefly vegetable and farinaceous, which permits continuous but not concentrated toil. It is a fact amply proved, that no animal whatever can obtain a high standard of speed or of strength without a full supply of the best procurable nutriment. Probably the greatest amount of labour per man, per diem, is reached by the English navvies, or railway labourers. They are, of course, the flower of the agricultural counties of England, physically speaking, attracted by high wages to a congenial employment. And a finer battalion of the grand army of labour the eye of man never rested upon. As I noticed the broad shoulders, the vast chests, and astonishing muscular development of many a gang of navvies, I felt proud of the blood in my veins, and of my English descent. They certainly *can* fling the earth about, and the continuous shovelling, loading, pick and barrow work is a task that only strong men, in high condition, can achieve. But how are they fed? One navvy gets more beef to his own share in the week than four farm labourers, with their four wives and a score of children, let us say: they are fed as Australian labourers are fed, with as much beef, bread, tea, or beer as they can consume.

And the quality of the work, as well as the quantity, performed by the two classes of labourers is almost exactly similar. They work, both in England and Australia, very frequently at 'piece' or contract work; both classes are spurred on to supreme exertion by increased pay. Both enjoy the highest standard of diet

known to working men in any part of the world. Both English navvies and Australian labourers or miners are in splendid bodily health and vigour, when engaged at the most severe work; both are willing to work to the outside limit of their capacity, for adequate payment.

But without the smallest desire to disparage Giles and Hodge, whose material is of the best and worthiest, and, as is only the case in the nobler races, infinitely improvable, I distinctly assert that their Australian cousins, Jack Windsor and Billy Day, will meet them any day in the harvest field, and at mowing, ploughing, reaping, or haymaking will do a better day's work in considerably less time.

Then the shooting, how jolly it was! The very look of Joe Warrender, the old keeper, himself the son of a Boldrewood keeper, was a continual delight to me. The man's square-set, wiry figure, his velveteens, his hale, frosted, winter-apple-looking face, his manners, his gaiters, his dog-wisdom, his cottage with the tame pheasants and partridges, were freshly interesting whenever they came under my observation. He was one of the many luxuries of the 'Happy Isle'—bred, kept, and broken for the sole use of the Squires of Boldrewood—in his own particular line, absolute perfection. The old man and I were soon the greatest friends. I often strolled off to his cottage during my early morning walk, and enjoyed the matutinal pipe all the more for his racy, sagacious talk. His cottage was beautifully neat. His wife and children matched the whole arrangements. Their great care and ambition seemed to be that the Squire should be able to show a 'good head of game,' and that his visitors, at all times, should have first-rate sport. He was pleased to compliment me on my shooting, wondering mildly that any gentleman 'as hadn't had pheasant and partridge shooting

regular should come to hold so straight; but the Boldrewoods was all shots—the gun came main handy to 'em.'

Now, this was a man that, in my considerations of the emigration question, it had always appeared to me gross cruelty to tempt to a colony. What had he to gain? while his losses, social and otherwise, were incalculable. His pleasant, almost luxurious home, his daily round of duties approaching to the nature of pleasures, his security of tenure of all these advantages, his lofty position, and occasional chats at the village alehouse, help when ill, and education for his children —all these he loses at a blow. In exchange, a ruder life, rougher work and wayfarings, social privations, and the chance of 'making money some day and rising in life,' often unrealised! I believe Joe would have felt the change as much as, or indeed more than, the Squire.

On Sunday mornings, we always, of course, went to church. We had not far to go; the church was not a great distance from the orchard wall, which had been built, or one like it, by an unscrupulous ancestor, to make sure of the purloined portion of the churchyard, when he had stolen it. Very ancient was the little church: low-browed Saxon arches, Early English architecture; hatchments and memorials of bygone Boldrewoods, on the walls, in niches, on the floor, in marble and in brass, attested their valour, their sorrow, and their deeds. A family pew, which took up a quarter of the chapel, received us at our devotions. The parson, gentlemanlike, cultured, correct, but not enthusiastic, preached an excellent, safe sermon. The congregation, I regret to state, consisted chiefly of old women and children, with a few aged male rustics. Where were the men of the village, the young and the middle-aged, whom I should have expected to see crowding the

village church? I do not know. They certainly—and this applies to other villages, in different counties, Wiltshire, Yorkshire, Kent—were not in the church. The building was damp, and rather cold; but these trifling discomforts would not operate prejudicially as far as they were concerned. They may have attended dissenting chapels, for aught I know. They may have preferred evening service. But of this fact I am certain, that, in agricultural parishes generally, the labourers do not attend the morning services of the Church of England.

On how many a morning did I stroll through the farms, sometimes by the meadows, tracing the course of the cheerful, gliding, willow-bordered stream, that was dignified with the name of river. It did not dry up in summer, certainly, but I felt a trifling incongruity in yielding so grand a title to a watercourse which a roused hunter could take in his stride. The greenness of the pastures was at first sight almost oppressive. It gave me the idea of half-grown barley, all was so brightly, tenderly verdurous. Green were the woods—ere yet the sere autumnal tints mingled their picturesque hues with gaudy tabards, heralds they of the waning year! In many instances the low size and comparatively small growth of the woods, as of a newly-planted shrubbery, occasioned a feeling of disappointment. But there were portions of the most ancient part of Boldrewood Chase which fully realised my anticipations. Here stood the mighty oaks, the lofty elms, which might have been saplings when Gurth and Wamba sang their roundelay. Here, as the legend goes, was roused the stag at which was loosed the shaft that drank deep of a king's life-blood; and here could I throw myself down amid the fern, and dream of serf and mail-clad knight and ladye fayre, of

That red king, who, while of yore
Through Boldrewood the chase he led,
By his loved huntsman's arrow bled.

So much had I become interested in the great field of observation which lay around in the immediate vicinity, that my cousins began to protest.

'Why, Rolf, you're turning into a college tutor, or an honour man on a reading tour. I feel ashamed of you, as a picturesque foreigner; you're getting quite like everybody else,' said Gwen one day, as I strolled in.

'There was a little difference in him when he first came, just enough to be characteristic, you know,' put in Adelgitha; 'but now you couldn't tell him from Harry Vane or Charlie Hexham, or any individual of the hordes of the lavender-kid-wearing youth of the period.'

'I always pictured an Australian as ever ready to fight or work, delightfully unconventional and heroic. Are you sure, Master Rolf, that you've ever done real work—subduing the wilderness and all that—or have you come here and received our—ahem—admirations, under false pretences?'

CHAPTER IX

'My dear Githa,' I was fain to reply, 'women are all alike—in England as in Australia—I perceive. Why am I to be goaded into chanting my country's and my own praises, very possibly without strict adherence to fact, if once started on the fascinating and proverbially wondrous narrative of the traveller? Why can't you let a fellow alone? We are like everybody else in

Saxon Christendom; we rear sheep and cattle with monotonous instinct, for want of better amusement, till gold comes and makes them valuable, or a drought scorches them up. What are left, a flood always sweeps away, drowning a few adjacent squatters. That's Australian life photographed. Sometimes a fellow survives and comes home, just to see his people and the old place, and when he begins to realise fairyland, you turn upon him and ill-treat the harmless "stranger within your gates." But I yield me, rescue or no rescue. What shall I do to uphold the fame of my native land?'

'Well, I'll tell you,' said Gwen eagerly. 'An idea strikes me. The hunting season is just beginning; we're not very far from Lord Fitzcharters's hounds. You must mount yourself nicely, and we'll go out now and then, just to see you astonish the county.'

I protested feebly. I need not say that my objections were laughed down, my arguments derided; before lunch was announced it was fully agreed that I was to buy four horses, and to ride like a true-born Australian. Something between a Mexican vaquero and the Honourable Crasher was evidently the sort of thing expected.

'I suppose I can pick up a safe-made horse or two in the neighbourhood?' I asked doubtfully. 'It's hardly worth while going to a London dealer.'

'To be sure you could,' said Gwen impetuously; 'but don't you dare to speak of safe horses, or we'll disown you. There hasn't been a Boldrewood with these hounds since Harold left for India and papa gave up hunting. So you'll have to ride for the Old Country and the New.'

'And so I will,' I said, answering her enthusiasm, and thinking how pretty she looked as she stood by the

oriel window, with her brown eyes flashing, her masses of silky hair pushed back, and her red lips slightly parted. 'So I will ride for the honour of the old house and the good land of spur and snaffle where I was born. One of us could ride a little once, I've heard say; but now I think of it,' I continued absently, relapsing into my former listless manner, 'it was the young one, Eric—pity he isn't here.'

'Nonsense! I don't believe a word of it,' laughed Githa. 'You must ask papa at dinner about Patcham, the dealer. He has always a few horses for sale, and sometimes a good one.'

'Well, boy!' said my jolly old uncle at dinner, 'so the girls have bullied you into hunting this season. I suppose my brother will stand the stud, and the Boldrewood stables have plenty of room—rather too much for my fancy—since Harold left.'

I intimated that, as to the purchase of hunters, my father had told me that I needn't be particular about a thousand or two being spent in good company.

'Ay, lad! that makes all the difference; Mark was always mighty particular about his companions when we were both young. Proud enough for a prince of the blood. And why not? We Boldrewoods have a right to hold up our heads as high as any in the land.'

I said that my father had instilled into me from my earliest youth the notion that, in pure blood and ancient descent, our family had few peers, titled or untitled.

'He was right there, lad—he was right there; and he told you that our ancestor Rolf, the Norseman, fought at Hastings with his brothers, Eric and Sigurd, side by side with King Harold. All the long day they had been in the front of the fight, and when Harold went down, Jarl Eric fought over the corpse, chanting death sagas, till the three brothers lay as low as the king.'

'But Rolf recovered from his wounds, didn't he, papa,' said Gwen, 'and married Adelgitha, the Saxon heiress of the Boldrewoods?'

'Yes, darling, and made a good Englishman. But about the horses—we must go and see old Patcham to-morrow, he knows every horse in the county. I did hear a whisper about a brown horse he had picked up lately.'

This point being settled, we drove down next day to where Mr. Patcham, located in an old-fashioned farm-house, surrounded by suitable paddocks, exercised his fascinating calling. It cannot be denied that enthralling attractiveness surrounds the profession of horse-dealer, especially in the higher classes of the animal. Impecunious individuals, who have never ridden or driven in their lives, have a conviction that they can make a fortune at the trade. Idle gentlemen try it, having made a twenty-pound note by a lucky purchase and luckier sale of a really sound and clever horse. The next venture is clever, but not sound. So the amateur dealer has to lose his money or afflict his conscience. In either case his experiences soon come to a close. People who have failed in all other trades make a final plunge at this one. It looks so easy. Those who mark the dealer sauntering through his stables with the straw of reflection in his mouth, think that they could ask £150 for a horse that costs £73 : 10s. as easily as he does. But they know not the heavy expenses, the unavoidable losses, the keen competition, the slack seasons of the trade; and they fail to observe that the same requisites for success in all other trades and occupations are needed here.

Some of these indispensable qualities Mr. Patcham undoubtedly possessed, or he would not have been the irreproachably dressed, well-to-do personage who so respectfully greeted us.

'Sorry you've come just now, gentlemen—really we're not fit to be seen; just getting ready for the season—hardly a horse to show *you*, sir.' (This to me as the buyer; the old gentleman, he knew, didn't hunt.) 'Just from India, sir, I presume, and wants a rattle over old England afore you're back with the niggers. Your nephew from Australia, Mr. Boldrewood? Well, I thought there was a look of the family about him too. Excuse me, sir, but I've known 'em all since I was the height of a ground ash—haven't I, Squire? Any 'oss as 'ud carry the gentleman well? thirteen stone, or say twelve and a half—thank you, sir. Well, gentlemen, you'll take a glass of my old ale after your drive, and then I'll show you the only 'oss I've got as I can safely say—that is, as I can recommend.'

Pouring out a stream of persuasive and deferential small talk, our entertainer insisted on our visit to the parlour prefacing that to the stables. Here a cold round of beef and a foaming jug of not particularly small beer assuaged any pressing bodily necessities which the drive might have produced. We looked at several nags of not very striking appearance, but which, according to all dealers' rules, were exhibited before we came to the favourite swindle of the establishment. At length a box was opened with more than the usual formalities, and a big brown horse, sulkily rising from his straw, somewhat startled me with the magnificent figure which he displayed.

Mr. Patcham drew back, and with an air of subdued triumph awaited our remarks, looking narrowly at my face the while.

He was one of the grandest horses I had ever seen. Evidently clean thoroughbred, he stood over sixteen hands, upon short flat legs, his shoulders were almost perfect, his quarters immensely powerful. With a

forehand that was lofty and aristocratic, his barrel showed that his constitution matched the speed he was certain to possess. Altogether he was one of the rarest combinations of strength and symmetry I had ever seen.

'What do you think of him, sir?' inquired Mr. Patcham. 'Breed many nags like that in Australia? I know they've got "Fisherman," some of the "Tramp" blood, and one or two good sires there; but Lor' bless us, there ain't a many like *him* in England, for the matter of that.'

'He's a great horse to look at,' I said. 'Head rather substantial—shows character—shouldn't wonder if he had some, unexpectedly too, perhaps. He is very strong—is he thoroughbred?'

'Strong, sir, you might plough with him! He is the biggest blood-horse I ever saw; thoroughbred too—a Flying Dutchman, dam from Irish Birdcatcher. You can't go higher than that, sir, can you now?'

'Very fine horse indeed,' I said. 'Now tell us what's the matter with him; of course there's some screw loose, or he wouldn't be all this way from the flying counties. I can see he's sound.'

Mr. Patcham looked mildly reproachful, almost hurt, by my unfeeling, distrustful allusion; but on my uncle's saying, rather testily, 'Come, Patcham, tell us all about it; of course we know he wouldn't be standing in your stables, since I've first heard of him, with his figure and jumping powers, if he is *quite* as good as he looks. Out with it, and my nephew will make a fair bid for him, whether or no.'

The dealer looked sharply at me for a second, and then declining the gaze of my uncle's rather stern blue eyes, threw as much truth and frankness into his expression of countenance as a life of dissimulation rendered possible, and solemnly began—

'I will not deceive you, gentlemen—the Squire, and you, sir—you're young, sir, but you know a thing or two about 'osses, strikes me. Well, the naked truth about the brown 'oss is this——'

Here he lowered his voice, and it seemed as if the unnatural enunciation of the unhelped truth was almost too much for him.

'Look at him again, sir.'

He lifted the rug, and the brown laid his ears back, and looked out of the slightly speckled corner of his eye with an expression that boded danger.

'What a pictur' he is—surely—he's a five hundred guinea 'oss. Sir 'Arry would give me a cheque for him, if I'd only warrant him. But his manners ain't according to his looks, and that's Heaven's truth, if it was my last dying word.'

'Does it make you think of dying when you tell the truth, Patcham? No wonder you were rather long-winded. And so you wouldn't give Sir Harry the guarantee for the £500! Deuced high-principled, wasn't it, Rolf?'

'Very touching,' said I; 'and now, what does he do?'

'Well, sir, I mustn't run down my own property; but they say he's the awfullest brute to ride in the whole county. None of my men or lads will look at him, and the consequence is he's short of work, and, as one might say, dangerous; he half-killed a rough-rider, so about here his character is gone.'

'If no one can ride him,' I said, 'he would hardly suit me.' Mr. Patcham looked at me with a slight expression of surprise; he had evidently, experienced as he was in reading the very souls of purchasers, made up his mind that I was hooked, was proud of my riding, and would take the horse at a trifle above his market value, irrespective of temper and vice.

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This conclusion seemed to him now hasty and possibly incorrect.

'Well, sir,' he said, shutting the door of the loose box, 'perhaps you're right. It's best to be safe. There's a gentleman here and there could ride him, but not every one. I'd be fit to bury myself if an accident happened to any young gent as was a friend of the Squire here. But I'd like to see him at Boldrewood, and I could take £200 for him, I really could, just to get shut of him.'

I was always very loth to relinquish the purchase of a horse that took my fancy. It was an axiom of mine, knowing the extraordinary difference between a horse of the first class and all others, that you couldn't pay too much for a good horse. In certain respects 'The Pirate'—such was his respectable name—was the finest hunter I had ever seen. Our colloquy ended in my cheque for a sum rather less than Mr. Patcham's valuation passing into that gentleman's possession, and an assurance on his part being given that the brown should be led over to Boldrewood next day.

'Well, Rolf, I think you have a good horse. He is the best-looking one,' said my uncle, 'that has been seen in this neighbourhood for many a day. I don't like the look of his eyes, though, and Patcham's account of his temper is terrific. You have no doubt, I suppose, that you can manage him?'

I smiled, with pardonable confidence, I submit. There is no great credit due to a bush-reared Australian for horsemanship. 'My dear uncle,' I answered, 'we need not consider that part of the question.'

'Well, Rolf,' said Gwendoline at dinner, 'I hope you have done something wonderful after leaving us alone all day. Githa and I have been out too, and seen ever so many neighbours. We're going to have

an archery practice before the great West Hampshire meeting, and so we've asked a lot of girls over to-morrow, partly for your benefit.'

'Indeed!' said I; 'how nice that I'm to be the only man.'

'Not quite, though the women will be in the ascendant, I am afraid; but the Marleys had their brothers home from Woolwich,—they are coming, and a cousin, young Demovay, one of the Vaurien family. He has just returned from Queensland, or New Zealand, or somewhere. Do you know, he rather abuses your country; says a gentleman can't get on there.'

'Does he though?' said I. 'I have heard unsuccessful young persons make that assertion before. And what did you say?'

'Well, we flew at him, of course, and Githa was very fierce and rather sarcastic; so we thought it better to change the subject; and then Herbert Marley said that "The Pirate"—a wonderful horse, that could jump a town, and would have won the Derby (only he bolted), and carried Lord Carvedown so splendidly in the great run with the Pytchley (only he left his lordship for dead)—was for sale at a dealer's close by here.'

'Ah, but Mr. Demovay said he would like to see "The Pirate" in Australia; that they thought themselves such wonderful riders there, with their buck-jumpers—which were no such great things after all; and that he had always said a good English vicious horse, with some blood in him, would teach them a lesson.'

'What did you say?'

'Oh, we laughed, and said we had always heard that Australians could ride anything, and that we were quite in love with the bush, for your sake; and that we were afraid that some Australian young lady had been

trifling with his affections, as there was a slight sourness in his remarks. We asked him with his cousins and then we came away, as I was afraid he and Githa really would come to blows.'

'Well, we will have an opportunity of backing his opinions in a small wager,' I said, 'if he has any money left after these unlucky Australian experiences. I happened to buy this delightfully wicked and notorious animal this morning.'

'Bought "The Pirate,"' said Adelgitha, with unfeigned dismay. 'Oh, papa, why did you let him? Didn't you know what a horrible creature he was?'

'Why, pet,' said the old man soothingly, 'your cousin is old enough and big enough to take care of himself. He's not made of sugar and spice, though he does come from a hot country. And we Boldrewoods, at home and abroad, I hope (here the light in the clear blue eye had rather a stern glitter), have always been in the habit of thinking we could do what any other man dared. That will do, you little coward, come and give us some music; the thing's done now, and Rolf has ridden many a worse horse, I'll be bound.'

'The stockriders at Jinderbah used to say that I could ride anything that ever went on four legs,' I quoted, thinking that the gasconade was justifiable for the reassuring of the gentle girl. 'I trust I am not old enough to have forgotten the way to teach both "The Pirate" and Mr. Demovay a lesson they will remember.'

The next day was one of unusual merrymaking at Boldrewood. My uncle had been averse to festivities since his wife's death, and disliked any interruption to his daily habits. But the girls had overcome his scruples for this occasion, and with greater ease, as archery was a favoured accomplishment in his eyes, as being a truly

ancient English sport. 'It is one of the pastimes which made England the country she is, or rather was,' he said, for, like all old-fashioned Tories, he occasionally deplored the decadence of the land and the race.

'It was good exercise—gave the advantage to a lass with a well-poised figure and some strength in her arms. None of your wasp-waisted weeds had a chance of drawing a good bow, or scoring a gold. What do you say, Rolf, do they ever go in for an old-fashioned game like that in your new country?'

'Well, you know, sir,' said I, 'that we are a savage people, consequently can't be expected to be up in all elegant accomplishments. Still, when I think of it, bows and arrows are perhaps a little in our line. If somebody hands me a bow, I will try.'

'I never know whether you are in jest or in earnest, but you seem like the other youngsters of the day to know everything—so I'd better take your archery for granted. The girls will find you a bow, I'll warrant. I must see after the butts, the tents, and the ale for the country folk, for I like to see a good muster of them.'

I had been a tolerably regular performer at archery meetings in my own land. They were favourite vice-regal entertainments in our colony, and at one time I practised rather assiduously, finding my reward in the smiles of a certain 'ladye fayre.' From time immemorial the archery ground has been favourable to flirtations, and the careful noting and sure recovery of the arrows of a goddess a choice offering at her shrine.

When I recalled the Australian surroundings—'the golden summer eves'—the azure cloudless sky—the slumberous charmed main—the velvet turf, which fays would scarce have disdained, I could not but think that the contrast, with the grayer sky, a lawn damp and in

places decidedly sodden, and the rich but somewhat tame scenery of Hampshire, was decidedly in our favour. But I did not say so. Many of my thoughts did not pass into words. I could scarcely have convinced my affectionately prejudiced relatives, and in social matters, as in military, it is well to be careful of one's base of operations before commencing the attack.

CHAPTER X

THE county mustered in force. The day was fairly favourable. There was an unwonted excitement about the shooting of the club—a neighbouring county had challenged them for the next month. All the best people were there. Great was the array of equipages. The member for the shire in the regulation green coat of the club was there, with his wife, who was the Hon. Mrs. Selby-Matlington. Sir George Glendover (the very oldest baronetcy in England) was as greenly habited, and, in spite of his years, as enthusiastic as the youngest competitor. The men were not so plentiful,—other amusements were more potent; but there was a considerable sprinkling of the *jeunesse dorée*, and among them Gwen pointed out Mr. Dufferly Demovay, and presently introduced us. After a good look at his scarcely prepossessing countenance, I set him down in my own mind as belonging to a special class of young men of good family, the members of which, on proof given that they are too indolent for the law, too stupid for medicine, too fast for the church, too old for the navy, too disreputable for the army, are considerately sent out to Australia. In that favoured land industry is

supposed to be unnecessary, and morality superfluous. It is therefore taken for granted, by his sanguine relatives, that Mr. Demovay will combine gambling with legitimate money-making, and young Escapade rise to be a Colonial Prime Minister, or a wealthy squatter at the least.

On reaching the colony, favoured by this desirable emigrant, the small sum of cash entrusted to the prodigal is soon dissipated. A trial of the interior is made, but a young gentleman who cares for nothing but brandy, cards, and tobacco is not found to be profitable, even in thinly populated regions. After a year or two's unsuccessful sojourn, he gravitates towards the coast cities, there to live aimlessly, if not disreputably, until he can cajole his family into sending the requisite passage-money which enables him to 'go home again.' Once there, he considerately abuses the colonies, declaring them to be places in which 'no fellah, who has the misfortune to be a gentleman, can get on,' denouncing the inhabitants to be vulgarians of an awfully low type—ex-diggers, bullock-drivers, cheesemongers,—what not.

One of this bright band—a returned 'colonial experience young man'—Mr. Demovay certainly was. He looked rather grand at the archery meeting, though, and gave himself the airs of a traveller. I had a slight desire to do battle with him, on the score of his unfriendly remarks about my country. But I bided my time, like the Master of Ravenswood, and applied myself to the pleasanter contemplation of the ladies of the land.

They were there in force. With belts, quivers, tassels, and every dainty appliance of archery, they looked most killing. As a rule they had the fair skin and the clear bloom that a life under a sky so frequently

clouded as that of England must give. Theirs was the beauty which the charming freshness of youth imparts. As to figure, they were well-proportioned, with something of the fulness of outline which in after-life promises only too solid charms.

But I must say here, in the judicial severity of truth, that beauty of outline, in form or feature, was by no means so frequent as I had expected to find. When an English girl is beautiful, she is one of the most perfect examples of loveliness, one of the rarest models of womanhood, that the world can show. She possesses, with beauty of face and of form, health, purity, and a well-stored mind; she is high-souled as goddess-moulded. But the type is rare.

As I strolled about, making these and other observations, I saw a carriage arrive, somewhat later than the general crowd, and going to the assistance of the ladies, to my wild astonishment I recognised a friend and compatriot in the very-well-got-up archeress who so gracefully descended.

'Miss Westland! by all that's delightful and unexpected,' I said, grasping her hand with most brotherly warmth, 'wherever did you spring from?'

'I came with Mrs. and Miss Granby, old Australian friends,—permit me to introduce Mr. Boldrewood,—they live near here. And now perhaps you will convey us to the target ground. Isn't the grass terribly damp?'

I joyfully accompanied my fair friend from the South to the great marquee which was devoted to the goddess Diana and any equipment or reparative adjustment that her votaries might require. In the vicinity I met my cousin Gwendoline, to whom I presented, with natural pride, my very creditable countrywoman. I rather enjoyed Gwen's slight—*very* slight expression of surprise, first called forth by my

possession of so overpowering a friend—heightened indeed when I begged her good offices for her as an Australian lady. She looked for an instant, with a faint air of doubt—as if her eyes had deceived her—at the beautiful and distinguished-looking girl before her; then, with the frank courtesy which was a part of her nature, proposed that they should rest awhile before joining in the *mêlée;* then the three ladies disappeared along a side walk, which led to a certain pleasant morning room, much affected by the younger members of the household.

I turned back amid the crowd, much exhilarated by the wholly unforeseen rencontre. There was no particular reason why other Australians—like myself sojourning with friends or relatives—should not turn up at so large a gathering. None whatever. But it had simply not occurred to me. I enjoyed, therefore, the sensation of surprise, mingled with that of pleasure. Why was I pleased?

In the long talks which I had with my cousins, and, occasionally, in slight passages of arms with their female friends, I had frequently noticed a faint sign of incredulity when I claimed for Australian girls a perfect equality in manner, in appearance, in dress, education, and tone—in a word, in a thousand-and-one nameless attributes that go to the composition of the *dame* (or *demoiselle*) *de salon.* They listened. They were too well bred to show disbelief in my glowing description and solemn asseverations. But they asked questions which discovered their secret distrust—'Had Australians exactly the same accent as the English girls? Were they not darker in complexion? Did they get all our new books there? Were they not more impetuous in disposition in that Southern land?' These, and a hundred other questions, I had met with fierce denial,

or parried with scornful counter-questions. But still an uneasy consciousness lingered that they were 'convinced against their will,' and lacked perfect faith. So I hailed with an eagerness of satisfaction rather unusual to my customary calmness the appearance on the scene of Elinor Westland.

She would triumphantly vindicate my proposition. For I could not have chosen, had I been permitted such choice, a fairer embodiment of 'whatever maiden grace the good old summers year by year made ripe'—well, not exactly 'within the chase,' but under a brighter sky, where the Southern Cross hangs lustrous o'er the fairy isles, the lonely plains, and forest parks of the great South Land.

Let me describe now, as I shall always believe, a rare example of high endowment, mental and physical. Am I perfectly impartial? Perhaps not. But mine is no fancy portrait. Elinor Westland was of the fullest height permitted to woman, compatibly with the possession of beauty. Her slender form was perfectly moulded, and lacked none of the nameless grace which youthful symmetry ever bestows. The outline of her features was almost purely Greek *en profile.* One might fancy, when her face was in repose, that one of the marble glories of the classic land had stepped down from the pedestal and come back, in huntress garb, to roam the green glades of the sterner North.

She was dressed in a manner which satisfied an exacting London milliner, who yet was made to understand their relative positions, to her great astonishment. She walked like a Spaniard, or better still, like a Nukuhiva girl, sauntering in floating steps that seem to glide above the milk-white beach, dreamily gazing on the low moon's trail of silvery splendour across a waveless sea.

She was distinctly clever, fairly accomplished, and possessed an amount of *aplomb* which enabled her to feel at ease in any society. She was high-principled, kindly, and generally what English people—and the word is very comprehensive—call 'nice.' She was hard to beat with the particular weapon we had been called together to exercise. Thus I argued another probable triumph in this respect. Altogether, I felt much comforted and encouraged as to the prospects of the Australian contingent. So thinking, I addressed myself to the threading of the well-dressed mob which was now gathered at the targets.

I borrowed a bow from one of my cousins' devoted admirers, and in the solemn tournament which followed managed to demonstrate that, with a little practice, I might have been chosen to represent the sacred vicinity of Boldrewood. But I was far more concerned watching the fortunes of our Southern Diana than in any small successes of my own. I did essay, indeed, to pick up her arrows; but speedily discovering that the appointment had been claimed by a large-acred county swell, and not wishing to interfere with the merited distinction conferred by his attendance, I prudently withdrew.

As the fair competitors neared the close of their shooting, and the records of outer and inner white, black, green, first and second gold, grew more complicated, the excitement became intense. Elinor was shooting with her accustomed nerve, and with more than her usual brilliancy. As she stood, perfect in attitude, with her small proud head thrown slightly back; as she loosed shaft after shaft, which sped dangerously near the centre, the high beauty of her form and face attracted the admiration of all. 'Who is she? Where does she come from?' were questions heard on all sides. The exercise had imparted a slight

colour to her transparent but ordinarily pale complexion. It was all that was wanting to complete the charm of her beauty. Her slightly-parted lips, and innocent pleasure in her skill, the air of sportive determination which she assumed, as she vowed to beat the English young ladies on their own ground, were all additional merits in the eyes of her admirers, who by this time had increased to a portentous number. The position of the fortunate picker-up of her arrows was dangerously enviable.

At length came the final, almost painfully intense, shooting-off.

Sir George's daughter Marian, the queen of the tournament, and this damsel from beyond the sea were level. They had beaten off all other competitors. There was a great hush as the final trial commenced. The alternate arrows flew and buried themselves in the much-enduring target with but little advantage on either side.

At the last arrow Marian Glendover, as she drew her bow for the momentous venture, slightly trembled. Her arrow grazed the edge of the gold. I looked at Elinor anxiously for one moment. I was reassured as she drew her arrow to the head, and paused for one moment with a statuesque pose, which I yet remember. The next moment the arrow flew, and a ringing cheer from the great crowd of spectators told that it had lodged in the very centre of the gold.

I felt a slap on my back, which discomposed my nerves and routed my reflections. It was my old uncle.

'Why, Rolf,' he said, 'you sly dog, are these the kind of neighbours you have in the backwoods? What do you mean by keeping her shooting dark, and cutting down the whole county? We must get her to shoot

for us in the next match. Take me over and present me this moment. I'm madly in love with her, and you'll have her for an aunt before you can look round. Make haste, or Sir George will cut me out.'

As we walked over, we found Elinor in the character of Diana Victrix, surrounded by admirers of every age and shade of fervour. Sir George Glendover, as President of the Archery Club, was about to make a speech, as he presented the first prize, a very richly embossed gold cup.

'It was the first time,' the handsome courtly old man said, 'that the prize of the West Hampshire Club, for first gold, had been won by any one unconnected with the shire. Miss Westland had taught them that they had overrated their shooting, and he trusted that the lesson would be beneficial to the young ladies of the club, his daughter among the rest. He might be wrong, but he confessed that he had for some time thought that there was a falling off in steady practice, without which archery of a high standard could not be preserved. He felt gratified, however, that they had been beaten by a countrywoman. That was something. He was just informed by his friend, Sir John Oldacre, that the winner was an Australian lady. His proposition was not affected by that trifling circumstance. He did not in the least mind where their gifted young friend had met with the accident of birth. No one could look at her for one moment and doubt that she was in face, form, mind, and style of shooting as perfect an Englishwoman as ever stepped. He had very unusual pleasure in presenting her with this trophy, which, he trusted, should she revisit her distant home, of which contingency he was bound to say he entertained doubts, would remain a souvenir of her West Hampshire friends.'

Much applause greeted Sir George's neatly-turned sentences—delivered with the easy grace which a quarter of a century since had proved dangerous, or old tales were untrue.

This important ceremony concluded, lunch became the plain duty of so many palpably hungry though fashionable persons, and bearing off Mrs. Granby, I found myself in the immediate vicinity of Elinor and my cousins, and not far from the head of one of the immensely long tables which were pretty well calculated for restoring suspended animation.

We had been so deeply interested that a reactionary sort of carnival set in. Mrs. Granby and I talked a little shop, and went back to old times—the terrible dry season of 185–; the entirely satisfactory price of stock at present; how Granby had partly made up his mind to remain at home till the boys were educated, but how he was a little hipped sometimes, and thought riding out to an out-station was better for his health than late dinners, and picture galleries—or even fishing and shooting.

'Ah, Mr. Boldrewood,' said the kindly pleasant matron, 'life in England is not always perfect happiness. Arthur and I had many a happy year in Australia, when we were on our promotion; though I used to grumble at the servants and other annoyances.'

'And are they—I mean the servants—as perfect here as we used to think?' I asked.

'Well, they are often very good, and I thought when I first came home that they were "laid on," like the gas and water—they struck me as so well trained and regular. But now I find English housekeepers have their own troubles, and lead by no means so Elysian a life as I pictured. Who is Elinor talking to just

now?—looks very like that uncomfortable young man, Mr. Demovay.'

It was that distinguished detrimental who apparently had got into an animated conversation with Mrs. Granby's charge. They were on the opposite side of the table, and as we stopped talking, I heard Elinor say with distinct intonation, 'Australians can ride, and in all other respects bear themselves as gentlemen,' with a slight emphasis on the last hardly entreated substantive.

CHAPTER XI

I TOOK a steady stare at Mr. Demovay, and thought from his appearance that he had not been sparing of the proverbially good champagne at Boldrewood. His tone when he answered had a ring of malice, such as a man does not usually use in argument with a lady unless slightly 'off his head.' 'I know Australians can *talk*,' retorted he; 'no people I ever met were more foolhardy—in conversation.'

'You forget, Mr. Demovay,' answered Elinor, after bestowing upon him one bright scornful flash from her gray eyes, 'that I am an Australian lady.'

'Come, Mr. Demovay,' struck in cousin Gwen, properly anxious to keep the peace, 'you are a little unkind. They must have done something dreadful to you out there to make you so *malin*. Were you not captured by the blacks, or squatters, or some kind of savage tribe, and didn't they make you work till you were ransomed? I'm sure I heard something of the kind.'

Here two friends of the unlucky youth burst into immoderate laughter.

'Pardon for making such a row, Miss Boldrewood,' said one of them, a cornet from the adjacent cavalry barracks, 'but the idea is too delicious. Did they make Dufferly work? how he must hate the country; he's the laziest beggar, by long odds—isn't he, Vane?'

'Saw a fellah in India once,' made answer Lord Vane Vaurien, oracularly, 'that I used to think could do a dead beat with him. But Dufferly here could allow him pounds of weight—give you my honour, Miss Boldrewood. Capital loafer, too, that Bengal civilian—most surpwisin' performer.'

Here his lordship looked mildly and admiringly at the object of his laudatory remarks, and Gwen, the pacifier, noting the darkening of his face, again essayed the olive branch.

'My cousin has bought "The Pirate," that celebrated animal that every one has heard of.'

Mr. Demovay made a slight gesture of surprise, after which malicious satisfaction gradually effaced all trace of annoyance as he said—

'Bought Bruceham's "Pirate"—what for?'

'Why, to ride, of course,' retorted Gwen rather quickly, in spite of her amiability. 'The hunting season is not far off, you know.'

Here I thought I might appropriately interpose: 'I have bought "The Pirate," Mr. Demovay, and I think I shall hunt him this season. Do you know the horse at all?'

'I know Bruceham well, who had him last year; he could make nothing of him. You must excuse me doubting whether he'll carry *you* to hounds.'

There was no mistaking the impertinence of this last remark. But, constitutionally cool, I was imperturb-

able by habit. Besides, I could not help regarding him as a 'colonial experience youngster,' with whom it would be unfair as ridiculous to lose one's temper.

'Our opinions differ,' said I, with much suavity; 'would you care to back yours for a trifling wager?'

This was the opportunity he had evidently longed for. He seized it greedily.

'I will bet you a level fifty,' he said, 'that you don't mount "The Pirate" on the lawn here and ride him to the spinney yonder and back without a fall!'

'Done,' I said quietly but promptly, as I took out my pocket-book and entered the bet.

'Take us in,' plaintively petitioned Lord Vane Vaurien.

'With great pleasure,' I answered; 'what shall it be?'

'Charlie and I go you a hundred each,' murmured his lordship. 'Honour of Old England, and so on. I suppose you've heard he's an awful bwute. We know him—don't we, Charlie?'

'Done and done,' said I, as I wrote down the wagers carefully, and read out the terms to the proposer. 'As for time, none like the present. Your schools and old women, cousin Gwen, are going to receive an unexpected donation.'

'Oh, Rolf, are you sure you are not going to be hurt? I hope you won't do anything rash. Here comes papa.'

I explained to my uncle the nature of the bet, and had his permission to have "The Pirate" brought round.

'It's rather early for circus business, and scarcely good taste to exhibit before your guests, but perhaps you will explain that I have merely accepted a wager which, in honour, I could hardly decline.'

'I don't see how you could,' said the old gentleman, 'on the terms offered, though I think the matter of argument need not have arisen.' Here the Squire looked as fiercely at Demovay as in his character of host he dared to do. 'You are not going to ride in that rig, are you?'

'No,' I said, 'I will order the horse round, and then make myself a little more comfortable for a bit of rough-riding.'

I made my way to the stables, where the brown horse was saddled under my personal supervision, adding a circingle to the ordinary girthing, and choosing a powerful Weymouth bridle.

'He don't like a curb bridle, sir,' expostulated the groom.

'But I do. He must take his orders from me for the future.' The man said no more, and telling him to lead him about the lawn till I came down, I sought my room, taking with me a substantial and efficient cutting-whip.

I doffed my rather *soigné* morning attire, and encased myself in a well-worn shooting-coat, tied a handkerchief loosely round my throat, put on an old wideawake, and with cords, butcher boots, and a pair of long-necked spurs, felt myself appropriately turned out for the conflict.

As I reappeared, one side of the great velvet lawn was crowded with the late archery-loving spectators, and it was evident that a sensation of more than ordinary strength was expected. It seemed that 'The Pirate,' on being led up, had been startled, and had commenced to plunge and kick so violently that the groom could scarcely hold him.

My cousins were rather pale, in spite of my uncle's scolding, who declined at this stage to see any danger.

'Bravo, Mr. Boldrewood!' said Elinor Westland, in her clear decided tones, as she stood between my cousins and the archery party. 'You look in something like the proper costume. Don't you feel as if you were going to ride a buck-jumper in dear old Australia? Mind you sit straight, for I've backed you for all the season's gloves.'

'Oh, but he may be hurt!' exclaimed a young lady in tragic tones.

'Nonsense!' retorted Elinor; 'an English horse throw an Australian! Why, I've a great mind to ride him myself, if my habit were here.'

Here everybody laughed, and I walked over towards the evil-reputed son of the ghostly mariner whose phantom bark affrights the seamen in the drear unresting main 'that for ever heaves and seethes around Cape Horn.'

How old days came back as I walked those few steps! Many a bright spring morning of my boyhood arose before me, as with a neighbour, a couple of stable-boys, a blackfellow, and an unbroken horse, we had adjourned to the creek flat for a somewhat exciting mount. I had been fond of horse-breaking from the earliest Timor pony period. I had ridden before my beard was grown every variety of horse of every age, and under every circumstance likely to produce hostile relations. I had galloped after wild cattle and wilder horses, through scrubs which only they and their pursuers could penetrate, down mountains, over rocks and declivities which only excited men and horses could have dreamed of crossing at speed.

Years of such experience had given to me, as to most country-bred Australians, that quickness of eye and hand, that instinctive, absolute security of seat, which is never obtained save by those who have ridden

from earliest childhood. The aspirant of later years may learn to ride more or less: he never becomes a horseman in the full sense of the expression. I was a finished performer, therefore, as a matter of course, and felt equal to the worst-tempered animal that ever stretched girth or threatened the life of Christian men. Small wonder, with my bush training! Indeed, much of this equine apprenticeship had been served under protest.

'Confound the horses!' my father used to say; 'I don't feel the slightest doubt as to my boys learning to ride, that's an exam. they're certain to come well out of. I am as sure of their riding like Mexicans as that this black imp now carried in a net basket will learn to cut out opossums and throw a boomerang. What I *do* feel anxious about is, that my lads will not regard stock-riding as the whole and sole aim of existence. With many a bush-reared youngster it is unhappily so. The intellect stops for life, like a cracked barometer "set fair," at bullocks and buck-jumpers, and never travels a yard farther. No! I'm anxious about Euclid, compound fractions, and the Latin Grammar; but as to their horsemanship, that may take care of itself.'

So my dear old governor had what he considered the regulation quantum of the humanities drilled into us, sending us to school year after year to that uncompromising headmaster through whose hands has passed the greater portion of the Australian Bar, the Senate, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Squirearchy, and discountenancing excess in musters and rough-riding. Still, with the perversity of human nature, we made the most of our bush opportunities, and, as I have before had the honour to remark, whether we ever thoroughly acquired a perfect mastery of mathematics

might be doubtful, but in the science of horsemanship we were capable of taking high honours.

Thinking something after this fashion, and feeling a world of old recollections rushing in panoramic rapidity through my brain, I took the reins mechanically, and motioned to the groom to leave the horse to me. An Australian always prefers not to have a restive horse held. 'The Pirate' snorted and sidled. He did not know me, and consequently did not like me. He turned round several times, and evidently intended to resist even the preliminary stage of mounting. I thought I would favour him with a bush invention. Holding the reins tightened in my bridle-hand, I secured his left ear, and giving it a severe screw, the pain of which rendered him motionless for a few seconds, I mounted lightly, and had my boot well home in the off-stirrup before the outwitted animal fairly understood the move. Then fairly aroused, he gave one tremendous plunge, and the fight commenced. Plunge after plunge followed each other, while a succession of kicks high enough to threaten the hat on my head was indulged in, with startling rapidity. A horse of immense power and in high condition, confident and obstinate as is every horse that has gained victories over man, he tried every mode and violent effort known to him to unseat me — all in vain! Proof against the awful galvanic shocks, the lightning side-lunges, the fierce, complicated, deer-like bounds of the Australian buck-jumper, unmouthed, unbitted, almost unhaltered—

> Wild as the wild deer, and untamed,
> By spur and snaffle undefiled—

I was not to be shaken by a thoroughly broken hunter, unable to get his head down, and behind whose splendid shoulders I sat like a rock. After a

sharp rally, and the performance of what 'The Pirate' and the spectators considered to be a perfectly unparalleled feat of horsemanship on my part, the partially subdued animal stood stock-still. A cheer burst from the crowd. But the victory was not gained. Rearing wildly, the savage brute trembled on the balance, until I thought he was actually coming over. Leaning forward on his neck, I drew one foot on to the saddle and waited to see which end would touch ground first. I pulled hard on the bit, knowing by experience that a rearing horse always bores down contradictingly, as if you wished to pull him backwards. As he lowered his head and placed his forefeet upon the turf again, I sent in the 'Latchfords' so unreservedly, that with an angry snort he snatched at the bridle, took the bit in his teeth, and stretched out in the full glory of his mighty stride. I headed him for the hedge and ditch, at the break of the shrubbery, and let him go. Before getting near the leap, I indulged him with a give-and-take pull or two, which might have loosened a tooth, but had no effect upon his pace. At racing speed we neared the ditch, on the other side of which was a bank with a low hedge and a single rail. The ditch was broad and deep, so that the rail, about three and a half feet high, was found to be sufficient protection. I steadied him ever so slightly, and sitting still and lying pretty well back, in case of accidents, the desperate brute flew the ditch, but scorning to rise, struck the strong oak-rail with his knees, and snapping it at the ends, carried it out before him like a bulrush. He made not the slightest stagger or stumble, but still strode on, as if the boundary of the county was the natural halting-place. A short mile and yonder are the pollard willows and rushy banks of the brook. It is a wide jump, and at places not too good at the take-off. By this time, with alternate slackenings

and such sudden drags at the powerful bit as nothing short of a Spanish bull could afford to despise, I am commencing to demonstrate to him what double-bridles are made for. He gives his head a little. He comes on terms. As we near the brook, he collects himself, and racing at it, takes it in what appears to be a mere extension of his stride. I gain the edge of the spinney, turn, and when he has swept over the wide water-jump for the second time, I am confirmed in my conviction that I have under me one of the grandest hunters that was ever backed. 'Jump!' old Patcham had said, with an expression of withering scorn, as applied to the intellect of that person who could, after looking at 'The Pirate's' quarters, doubt his ability 'to clear a town,' 'that's what makes it so hard to bear. He can gallop equal to anything of his year, and jump any mortal thing. Oughtn't that to be a fortune to any man, sir? And to think that I should lose it, all along of his wicked temper. It makes me feel unchristian, sir, so it do.' The pace, the leaps, the conflict had rather subdued 'The Pirate' by this time; so before taking the fence by the shrubbery, I managed to have him pretty well in hand. He deferred to the bridle, lowered his head, and 'gave' peaceably to the compelling curb.

Picking out a wide place and a good hog-backed rail, I sent him at the rail pretty fast, and perhaps remembering its sharp contact with his knees when outward bound, he made no such blunder returning, but sailed over ditch and bank and rail after a fashion that elicited a tremendous cheer from the excited crowd which stood on the lawn to see the run in. As I pulled up the sobered horse upon the lawn, and handed him over to the groom, I was conscious of being the hero of the hour. Congratulations poured in on every

side. My fair acquaintances of the archery ground wondered that any one could sit so beautifully and so quietly. No effort at all.

'Do all Australians ride like that?' asked the lovely Mrs. Syrenly.

'Oh yes,' I said, 'most common thing—blackfellows, everybody.'

'Oh, I daresay,' chimed in Elinor Westland, who, with Mrs. Granby, was standing with my cousins. 'I won't have you throw away all this genuine admiration that is being showered upon you. Don't believe him, Mrs. Syrenly; he rides very nicely, indeed, and "The Pirate," though I did say I might ride him, wouldn't be considered a safe and pleasant mount even in Australia.'

'Aw, weally! must congwatulate, and all that,' quoth Lord Vane Vaurien; 'doocid nasty bwute I call him; wouldn't wide him myself for a kingly cwown. Make a note not to bet against Austwalians in fuchar. Eh, Duffer?'

But that young gentleman had departed.

As I was retreating to my room, I encountered my uncle.

'Ha, boy!' said he, grasping my hand and crushing it for a moment, after a fashion which set me considering as to whether my treatment of 'The Pirate's' ear was wholly justifiable. 'So you've given them all a lesson in rough-riding, I hear. Well, I thought the blood would come out; I shall never ask you whether you can tackle one of our English horses again. Child's play, Gwendoline says—perfect child's play to you. Now go and put on your war-paint, and you'll have an opportunity of making play with that lovely countrywoman of yours. The great hall is cleared out, and the girls have settled that there is to be a dance.'

CHAPTER XII

THIS good news turned out to be true. My cousins had contrived to convey to all the young ladies, as well as to most of the men, the gratifying intelligence that the archery fête would wind up with a ball. 'From information received,' therefore, certain articles of feminine evening attire, if not whole ball-dresses, made their appearance, and a *tout ensemble* calculated 'to produce a breach of the peace' of mind of the male portion of the company was effected. Boots, gloves, and ties, suitable for evening purposes, mysteriously emerged from pockets and bags. Musicians were suddenly observed, and at an hour rather unfashionably early we entered the grand old hall, the dark wainscotting of which had been tastefully relieved, while the floor had attained a pitch of perfection which I never anticipated. As Elinor Westland and I swept over its polished surface to the strains of the Mazeppa, in the first dance, we agreed that Old England was not such a bad place after all.

'How horrified some of our home friends would be to hear us say so!' continued she; 'but, after all, there is something provincial about this very party. It is not so unlike a ball at a country town in Australia. We are only half in evening costume, and, excepting you and a few others who have taken an unfair advantage of being near home, all the men are in "mixed array."'

'But they couldn't all combine archery with ball-going,' I said; 'and you wouldn't have them bring a full suit of dress clothes with them?'

'Of course not,' she replied. 'I like impromptu things as much as any one; but if we do anything of this kind in Australia, English people are very fond of saying that is because we are uncivilised and know no better.'

'Have you been much patronised, Miss Westland?' I asked.

'I was patronised to death at first, it having been taken for granted that I had never heard, or seen, or read, or learned anything that young persons of my age in England were familiar with. I found it easier, on the whole, to profess total ignorance than to be always answering silly questions. Then, after my acquaintance with ordinary matters leaked out, they went to the opposite extreme and fancied I knew everything.'

'I shouldn't wonder if they were rather surprised now and then,' I answered, thinking of her wonderful soprano voice and the diligent musical coaching that she had received; of her grammatical knowledge of French and German; what a purist, too, in pronunciation, and all other matters connected with English, was that dear old lady, Mrs. Westland, the most refined and courteous *grande dame* that one could imagine. I thought with much amusement of Elinor being told about things in general, and favoured with bits of information, by average young ladies, in an English country town.

'Well, honestly, I think they were taken aback, now and then, at my small attainments, seeing that I was only a "despicable colonist." But tell me about yourself, Mr. Boldrewood. What are you going to do? marry one of these charming cousins of yours? What sweet girls they are! I wish the old gentleman would come out and buy a station next to us. What delightful neighbours they would be! Or are you going

to turn into an imitation Bond Street swell, and cut our dear old country for ever?'

'I am not going to marry any one yet, as far as I know,' I replied; 'certainly not my cousins, dear girls as they both are; and I am not exactly constructed for a swell—that is, of the English pattern. A man can't take to the profession of utter idleness all at once. He must be brought up to it. I shall have another year's ramble, and then go back thankfully to the land where the main business of my life will be transacted.'

'So you think now,' she said; 'you have hardly become accustomed to the perfect luxury of English life. Another year will slay some of your good resolutions.'

'I gracefully acknowledge that I am mortal—but I doubt your deduction. I have noticed, however, that your sex takes more kindly to this luxurious land than does ours. For one woman who would like to be back in the land of her kindred and of her early home, there are fifty men who pine in London drawing-rooms, on Scottish moors, or in Continental picture-galleries, for the healthy, happy, wild life of the colonies, and the joyous pulsation of every vein, as they galloped over a plain, or dismounted at sunset from a long day's ride under a burning sun. I am not so very certain,' I added a little mischievously, 'that we shall see *you* again so far from the centre of civilisation.'

At that moment Godfrey Oldacre, who had so carefully collected Miss Elinor's arrows in the early part of the day, came to claim her for the coming dance, and our semi-philosophical disquisition came to an end.

I was leaning against a doorway looking on at the decidedly energetic performance, when my cousin Githa bore down upon me and carried me off. 'I wonder

why,' said I, 'people always dance with so much more spirit in the country. In town every one seems afraid to dance; the men saunter, and the girls decline passively to "put on the pace"; while in the country, young and old, girls and married women, swells and provincials, all seem inspired with a kind of carnival spirit. Look at Lord Vaurien—you may swear he wouldn't dance in London, perhaps not lower himself so far as to come. Look at him now, what a pace he and that little plump Miss Howard are going—and Mr. Oldacre and Elinor.'

'The reason is, that in the country every one is more fresh and natural; people drop their affectations of being bored, or too grand or refined to enjoy themselves, and get into harmony with the country air. What a pretty nice creature your compatriot is—and how she does dance—*à merveil!* it is quite a pleasure to watch her, and when we look into the glass to-night Gwen and I will feel quite disgusted with ourselves. And now, having uttered all this wisdom, you will please come and dance with Miss Torywhyppe—she's a great swell, sister to that clever, impudent Mr. Torywhyppe—not our member, I'm thankful to say.'

So I was committed to the guardianship of the said damsel, who was satirical enough to warrant her relationship to so eminent a political character. She mildly disclaimed any intimacy with the natives, and enjoyed the thing from an external and elevated standpoint. 'Here again,' thought I, 'is another social subdivision. The majority of these respectable, well-born people, enjoying themselves in their simplicity to-night, would look down upon one of our Australian gatherings as upon a New Zealand war-dance, or a Barbadoes dignity ball, while this fair damsel, from the elevation of her London habitudes, looks down upon

them, and carefully guards against a stranger concluding that she is "of them."'

My next partner was what unreflecting youngsters call a 'jolly little girl.' She lived in the country, and gloried in it. She rode habitually, and hunted, and shot now and then.

Few things are pleasanter than the breakfast-table review of a fête the morning after its occurrence. My uncle had a strong dislike to excessive slumbering, and was impatient of deserters from early parade. His daughters humoured his prejudices, and were rarely absent from the breakfast-table—even after revels the lateness of which might have justified secession. We, therefore, were in a position to examine at our leisure next morning the strong points or otherwise of our departed guests. I pronounced a highly favourable opinion of the whole entertainment, from the beginning of the archery to the end of the dancing, about which latter period I had the supreme gratification of the last galop with Miss Westland—an immortal and utterly unapproachable performance with which I was well pleased to close the festival.

'Rolf is thinking of his *belle sauvage*,' said cousin Gwen; 'that's where all the success lies. No, I oughtn't to talk like that, or call her anything but what she is—a sweet, graceful creature, with a manner as perfect as the rest of her; possesses originality and character, too. I don't think that Miss Grant, that they make such a rout about, and who is to be the belle in town next season, is to be compared with her. What do you think, papa, you're a judge?'

'My dear,' said the old man, 'I think she's the most beautiful young creature I ever saw in my life. Her figure is as near perfection as—ahem—a civilised dress will permit a girl to be. When she stood for a

moment, with her bow bent, and then sent her last arrow into the gold, it was the finest living "pose" I ever saw. You must have her over here, if you can get her to come.'

'So we shall, if that nice old Mrs. Granby will let her; she's awfully careful about her, I believe; I should like to hear her sing.'

'I shouldn't wonder if Godfrey Oldacre would feel interested in her voice, too,' put in Githa. 'He was rather restlessly assiduous, and, considering that he is not over-civil generally, most touchingly kind to us. But we shall have Rolf quarrelling with him. Are you very devoted, or is it only the warmth of your Australian manner?'

'I thought you were complaining of the coldness of what you were pleased to call my foreign manner a few weeks ago,' returned I. 'But reassure yourself; I shall not enter the lists with Captain Oldacre.'

'And why not? Don't you admire her very—very much?'

'Yes, I do, honestly. I think Elinor Westland very beautiful and graceful. I know her to be clever, amiable, and good. But for all that, we are not in the very slightest degree likely to cherish an undying passion for each other. We have known each other all our lives; and somehow one never falls madly in love with the fully-comprehended angel—it's the mingled mystery and sudden charm of the unknown that work the spell which men call love.'

'You men get delightfully taken in every now and then with your lovely unknowns,' said Gwen, 'and then what becomes of the delicious mystery! It is almost a shame that men should ever be deceived—they are so rash and confiding. But never mind, Rolf! I have some hope that you will not be a distinguished victim.

I have noticed a tendency to caution in your character, from which I predict good things.'

'What do you think of Miss Torywhyppe?' said my uncle; 'wouldn't she do? Fine girl, lots of ability, would be leader of society wherever she got a chance, and all that.'

'Wouldn't acclimatise—she's too Londony even to enjoy country life here decently. I've seen her sort in Australia. Their life is one long protest against existence in colonies. Why should anybody ever under any circumstances live out of England? is their eternal dirge. Their dissatisfaction is chronic; the husband becomes disheartened or reckless, sells out at the wrong time, and returns to England to finish a wasted life, and practise pitiful economies for the sake of living in a country which, as a poor man, he detests.'

'There's that nice little Mary Howard,' pleaded Githa; 'full of accomplishments, reads, and rides, and shoots rabbits, and she's so strong.'

'If she were to shoot much in Australia she would be rather surprised at the sensation she would create,' I retorted. 'We are English in all our manners and customs, I humbly submit, but rather old-fashioned, and on some modern accomplishments, such as slang, fastness, a masculine get-up, and the shooting of our little friend, we should look askance.'

'There's no satisfying you, I can see. Here's a county full of nice damsels, arranged for you to look at, and you won't see any beauty in them. One would think that all the girls in Australia were like your friend Elinor, and that would be impossible. Stay, there was the clergyman's daughter, Bessie Waters—isn't she nice?'

'I daresay she is, my dear and most maternal-in-law cousin Gwen, but why this urgent and unalterable necessity for me to be settled in life? I am of a con-

templative disposition, and require a deal of thinking before I commit myself to anything, especially such an awfully irrevocable deed as marriage. The ideal is fair, and looks wistfully at me with her haunting smile and marvellous eyes. Why sever myself from her for ever? For ever! It has rather a sad sound.'

'You are a romantic goose, Rolf; I thought only our silly sex furnished dreamers of dreams. You will go on waiting for the impossible combination—until—you get elderly, like Mr. Jaunteyson, and then marry the first school-girl miss that will have you!'

'I feel much inclined to carry the war into Africa,' I replied. 'What unkind things I could say of women, of their woful mistakes, perverse fancies, and mad infatuations; but I forbear. And now, having disposed of one of the great problems of life, don't you think a drive would do you and Gwen a world of good? I'll order the mail-phaeton at two sharp, and we'll freshen up our jaded physiques.'

As we bowled along the well-gravelled, well-kept country road, behind a pair of fast-stepping bays, matched to a hair, and ready to pull one's arms off from rest and condition; as the mouldering ruin loomed huge and vague, and, in returning, the pleasant voices of the girls sounded low and sweet in the gathering twilight; as the shadows of the grand old trees fell darkly upon the broad green meadows and the quiet river, I felt inclined to debate the point of going back to Australia. Here, in this ancient, historic land, was all the enjoyment that could be dreamed of. I had already sufficient for my reasonable needs. Why further tempt the main? Why again voluntarily seek the harsh cares, the mordant anxieties, the fierce strife with nature, which the life of a colonist compels?

The picture was fair, the contrast vivid, the syren voices sweet, but the sorcery was powerless to still the accents of the heart. What! quit the ranks, and the forefront of the battle, for the first valley, the first well-shaded grove? What of my career abandoned, friends deserted, tenants and humble neighbours neglected, the good land that has done so much for me and mine forsworn? I, who had received so much, must needs for God and native land play a man's part.

CHAPTER XIII

CONSCIENCE—sharpened by biliousness—went ding-donging at such an awful rate, to this and other unpleasant tunes, that she speedily had the best of it. I gave in, and expelled the inglorious idea of turning Englishman. Sooth to say, I had a strong bias to her side of the argument. Without being one of those uncomfortably energetic persons, who are as restlessly active as steam-tugs, and nearly as agreeable, I had hitherto had something to do—occasionally of a difficult and toilsome, but always of a considerable and important character. The idea of an existence of mere comfort, unrelieved by necessary effort or anxiety, presented itself unalluringly. I beheld myself married and settled with a wife who hated Australia, Cape Coast Castle, New Zealand, and the West Indies with equal and undiscriminating intensity. I saw myself a poor-law guardian, perhaps a county magistrate; managing a farm, at an annual loss, about half the size of the Boldrewood (New South Wales) horse-paddock; doubtful of my resources on any given day lasting

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until it was time to dress for dinner; growing heavier every year, and more prone to decline the increasingly arduous enjoyment of hunting; thirsting at intervals for a month's cattle-mustering at one of the far stations, on the ocean-like plains of Salt-bush Land—for the aromatic scent of the primeval forest, as one rode fast at midnight through the winding wood-paths. Here the picture became too dreadful, and as I let out the impatient horses from the lodge to the great hall door, I inwardly registered a vow not to turn myself into a non-combatant until I had more fully shared in the battle and the bivouac of New World life.

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Again in London. The Derby is imminent, and I am, of course, minded to assist at the great equine tournament of Epsom Downs—the nearest approach to a Carnival which the sad-souled Englishman knows. I hold, though it be the fashion to call that much-abused Briton morose, sullen, suicidal—what not, that the typical Englishman is maligned. He has not the demonstrative merriment of Southern races; but he is cheerful and equable to an extent which will bear favourable contrast as to average with the lighter types of mankind. He does not suffer from the terrible fits of despondency inseparable from the bubbling gaiety of the South. When danger appears, his spirits rise, and the larger nature of the man is stirred. He is not unduly elated by success, still less depressed by failure. He possesses in a greater degree than almost any other the regal gift of moderation. Without brilliant wit, he has a sense of humour which comprehends the most tenderly delicate, the most deeply pathetic, the most intensely comic phases of the faculty. Calm of manner for the most part, but chivalrous and self-denying, the imputation of rudeness is utterly unfounded.

Of course, the exception which proves the rule is not wanting. The following is well-nigh a solitary instance.

On board a Rhine steamboat, lazily gazing upon the wine-clad slopes, which were a trifle monotonous since the last castle, I saw a man walk deliberately up to a quietly-dressed girl sitting on a chair talking to a friend. He said, 'That is my seat,' and as she looked up wonderingly, he repeated the assertion in a hard, matter-of-fact manner. 'By Jove!' said I to myself, 'here is the Englishman of the poets, or, at any rate, of the foreign playwrights at last, with his "insular brutality" plain for all men to see.'

Before I had time to interrupt, the girl arose hurriedly. She did not look robust, while retreating to an uncomfortable bench. She wore a timid look, and seemed half frightened, as an apology rose to her lips for the unintentional malversation of which she had been guilty. The brute himself was no invalid, evidently, but some species of tourist. He gave a half-satisfied smile, and prepared to take possession. I was too quick for him. With one bound I was beside him, and in another second sitting on the chair he had sinned so deeply to recover.

'Turn *me* out of it,' I exclaimed, I fear with some excitement of manner, 'as you did this young lady!' He advanced with a show of resolution, but noticing, perhaps, an expression which boded instant bodily peril, he refrained, and stated calmly his proposition for the third time.

'May I ask,' said I, with assumed coolness, 'what country has the honour to claim you?'

'I don't see what that has to do with it,' he answered. 'I am an Englishman, if you must know.'

'Your country ought to be proud of you,' I said. 'You are the only rude Englishman I have met. But

I tell you now, you shall not have the chair till we get to Mayence, were it ten times yours.'

He appealed to the captain, who declined to interfere; then to the passengers, who laughed and said it served him right. I retained possession, and managed to persuade the fair expelled one, with the aid of Leslie as ambassador, to reoccupy it. We kept guard alternately till we disembarked at Mayence, where we left him his property, making him a present of the lesson and its accompanying reflections. With one other exception, I declare this was the only instance of deliberate rudeness which I had witnessed on the part of Englishmen in their own land or abroad.

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Babylon, the great city, in all the pomp and glory of the beginning of the season! The parks were dazzling to my eyes, accustomed to the sombre hues of the forests of my native land. The turf, the bursting, vivid greenery of the foliage, the trim arrangement of park and pleasaunce, the glorious shade, were like a 'Royaulme of faerye.' Then the fashionable crowd; the daily procession of dowagers, millionaires, commoners, belles, bishops, poets, politicians, princes, dukes, and demireps, all beautifully mounted or fashionably driven, was a sight only to be seen in one city in the world. Where else could the horses be found? Nowhere, if a congress of Rothschilds gave *carte blanche* for their production, but in London.

I was often asked by those querists who take it for granted that colonies, albeit inhabited by communities at least equal to those of average Englishmen, are inferior to all portions, however remote or provincial, of the mother country, whether I was not much impressed by the superiority of English horses. My answer was somewhat in this wise—'I cannot say that

I have seen in England horses of such surpassing excellence that I should at once pronounce them superior to anything of the sort that I have ever seen in Australia. But the real difference lies here: we boast race-horses, hunters, carriage and cart horses equal to anything of their class in England except the acknowledged emperors equine. And our Australian hackneys are certainly, in speed and endurance, superior. But the classes are smaller, necessarily. We can show weight-carrying hunters that negotiate habitually the high, unyielding timber fences of Australia, and go best pace for the longest run with hounds after deer or dingo. So with the others. Our carriage horses are large, handsome, well-actioned, well-matched, and many a waggon team would disgrace neither Suffolk nor Lanarkshire. But for every score of these England can produce a hundred—I had almost said a thousand. The matchless carriage pairs, behind which that drawing-room on wheels, called an English carriage, rolls, tenanted perhaps but by a wrinkled and aggressive dowager or a mournful millionaire, can be counted in the season by the hundred. Endless streams of browns, greys, chestnuts, matched to a hair, coachmanned to a curl of the periwig, footmanned to a shade of calf, "flow on for ever."'

I found that my friend and fellow-voyager, Norman Leslie, had wended his way to the city of the Southron, and was awaiting the Great Race. He had been visiting his friends in the Highlands. Norman was as true a Highlander as ever wore kilt; it was visible in his keen blue eye, in his close, curling, light brown hair; and when roused, and then only, in the tremendous nervous energy which, like all Celts, he threw into his acts and deeds. He could chatter Gaelic, to the great delight of his father's old shepherds, many of whom

knew but little English. He knew Sir Walter Scott by heart, and had an immense stock of ballads and border minstrelsy of the most genuinely ancient Scottish ring. Yet with all these North British characteristics, he was a born Australian, and had been reared on an exceedingly flat and sandy cattle-station, at no great distance from my father's. Hence our friendship. We had been boys together, had hunted kangaroos on foot, and sewed up side by side the ghastly wounds and ripped cuticle of our favourite greyhounds. We had been scolded, threatened indeed with the stock-whip, for talking and letting the cattle at muster time 'draw off the camp.'

We had ridden races against each other on our favourite ponies, and had been sent to the same school, sharing alike in corporal punishment, forbidden bathings, cricket, pugilistic encounters, and all the terrors and triumphs of boyhood; finally, we had received permission to make our grand tour about the same time, which, with its various and wider experiences, still more closely cemented our friendship. I ought to add that Master Norman had a strong taste for practical jokes, and under a calm, not to say mild, exterior concealed a daring spirit, and an utterly reckless enjoyment of mischievous frolics.

'Well, my Lord Boldrewood!' said he, as we met in Regent Street the day after I came up, 'how are you? I trust your lordship's family is well. You look more Saxon than ever, as if you had been feeding on the beech-mast, whatever that may be, that the porkers of Cedric ate?'

'I am well, Norman, and my people have survived their surprise at finding me to be white, and able to read and write; but how did you find the Clan Chattan, or whatever barbarous appellation your Highland friends

rejoice in? Were they delighted to see you, and did they say, "Have ye any Gaelic?"'

'They did not say that, or anything else that might have been expected. The fact is, that the Highlands have become so civilised that they have lost all their romantic differences. My cousin, Angus M'Aulay, is the greatest swell I have seen for some time. He goes in altogether for English ideas; said he had forgotten all his Gaelic. The old men of the clan nearly wept over me when they discovered I could talk it so readily.'

'And what do you think of the Highlands generally, and the land of your fathers? Would you like to live there and settle down with a fair-haired Glen Duart maiden for the rest of your days?'

'Well, I don't see any beauty in yellow-haired women myself,' answered Leslie, 'though I daresay one could find a dark-haired daughter of the land, if one tried very hard; but God forbid that I should have to live all my days in Glen Duart. I should choke, it's so small, if I didn't anticipate destiny by the imprudent consumption of whisky. By Ossian the Bard! but they know how to drink it in those misty mountain regions. It's very good, mind you, and I'm not a total abstainer, but really I couldn't go the pace.'

'So you wouldn't take Glen Duart in exchange for Myall Plains, and all that miserable flat country of yours, where there isn't a hill the size of a haystack for a hundred miles?'

'Not on any account. It may be monotonous and short of scenery, but there is a sense of scope and grandeur about a plain where you can jump on a horse and ride for fifty miles on end through your own run. Besides, a little too much sun is better than nine months' rain or snow or fog.'

'But think of the deer-stalking, and the grouse-shooting, and the salmon-fishing, Norman.'

'All very well in their way,' he answered, 'for a year or two, and I am not going back just yet, I promise you; but shooting and Glen Duart for ever—fishing and Glen Duart for ever, no, thank you! we must have another gallop over the big plains, and have more sunburning in Australia, before we die, or grow old, or settle in England, and have our slippers brought to us, and read *The Times* every morning—eh, old man?'

'Very much my own idea, but more forcibly put,' quoth I. 'Still, as we happen to be in London—a place which has its merits, in spite of its distance from Australia the Happy—suppose we consider the programme for the Derby day. How do you go?'

'The very thing I was going to say,' answered Norman. 'There are a lot of other fellows, all Walers, going down in Charlie Templemore's drag. We're to join forces as to general commissariat; Charlie coaches us there and back, with that irreproachable team of his. He stipulates that no one under six feet is to be of the party, as it would spoil the general effect. You and I are well over the standard, and Templemore himself is six feet four, good measure.'

'I can't see the utility of a grenadier company, unless he wishes to create an impression—totally erroneous—that all Australians are six feet high. However, Charlie is a good fellow, and a splendid whip, though thus eccentric, so we must humour him. My people are not coming, so I may go and disport myself with you and Templemore and the other *roués*, with comfort and impunity. Where do you dine?'

'Anywhere, no engagement.'

'Then come with me to the Reform Club. The

great Bunter gives a dinner there to-night, and asked me to bring a friend.'

So about half-past seven we found ourselves in the comfortable apartment permissible to the guests of members of that institution. Bunter himself, a squarely-built elderly man, with that particular cast of countenance which invariably denotes self-reliance, was already there, with about a dozen others, to whom we were introduced, or whom we greeted, as the case might be.

'Well, Boldrewood, my boy, glad to see you and Leslie,' said our host in a loud, cheery voice. 'Heard from the governor lately? hope he's well. Great respect for your governor; had an awful fight with him once about some back country; those Dilfandra blocks—you remember perhaps? No? you were quite a little chap then. He beat me, too. Always thought I ought to have had 'em; but Banks, who was then in the Lands Office, stuck to him, and I lost them. Fine country, worth a lot of money now; but it all comes to the same thing. We've both got enough, haven't we?'

'I hope so,' said I; 'you have, if all tales be true. I suppose we shall never see you across the Murray again?'

'Well, yes; you will see me, my boy. John Bunter has a deal too much property on your side of the water not to go and look after it himself, once and again before he drops. However, things are pleasant here, and I can't deny I've got along in society, between ourselves, a deal better than I ever expected. Oh, here come those other fellows. Templemore you know. Sir Harry Downcome, Lord Beaumanoir, let me introduce two Australian friends of mine, just come home.'

There was no unnecessary delay as to the dinner, and we were soon in that pleasant stage of anticipatory satisfaction which accompanies the first glass of undeniably good wine, with a well-founded conviction that more

is to come. Bunter gave his mind to his little dinners, took good advice when it was to be had, exercised foresight, calculated the mutual effects of his guests, spared no expense, and was successful in consequence, as he had always been in enterprises of greater moment.

We were soon on good terms with each other. Several of the men were colonists, who, though personally unknown to us, had an Australian reputation. One or two had been birds of passage, who had sojourned long enough to win daughters of the land, so well dowered as to preclude the necessity of returning. Others had relatives settled there. One man's name stirred the hearts within us as we looked on the noble, war-worn features, and those dim eyes, the light of which had faded in the pitiless sun-glare of the great Australian desert. Mild, self-denying, humane, but full of the stubborn courage which neither sickness, loneliness, danger, nor imminent death could for one moment shake, we felt the indescribable instinctive tendency to hero-worship which the bodily presence of an *anax andrōn* evokes. What Australian unmoved could hear the name and gaze on the face of the great explorer, Charles Sturt?

We talked a good deal of shop, doubtless. But there was something exciting in the companionship of men who had braved the perils and tasted the joys of Bushland. Many of our party had so perfectly acquired, by a lengthened residence among Englishmen, their air, manner, and general tone, that they were to strangers utterly undistinguishable from the 'herd of moneyed loungers' that roam over Britain and the Continent. But the spell once broken by the uprising of old associations, the faultless club men became emotional and natural to a degree almost ludicrous, and talked sheep and cattle, wool and tallow, packhorse and pan-

nican, shepherds and ration-carriers, till you would have thought we were all having a mild spree at the nearest township, and were going back to our stations next day.

CHAPTER XIV

'AUSTRALIA is a glorious land,' said the Explorer, his sad, proud face lighting up with a sudden glow, as he raised his head and looked forth, as if he were sweeping once more the faint undulations towards the far sky-line. 'I gave my health—wellnigh my life—in her service, but I have never repented it. When I think of the value which her fertile acres, so rich in corn and wine, flocks and herds, gold and gems—though these last I hold cheaply—will be to the future inhabitants of this island, I thank God, who permitted me to share in the discovery of the Promised Land. And I am filled with amazement, knowing these things, that of our present generation of young Englishmen so few comparatively elect to try colonial life.'

'Quite right, my dear sir,' struck in Bunter, with his strong uncompromising tones. 'I was of your opinion as far back as 1820 (I was only a youngster then). I wasn't a swell, far from it—only a small farmer's son; but I wasn't too contented, and I put two and two together. I saw plenty of my neighbours willing to stay at home as long as they had a meal and a glass of beer, or even a chance of it. "No place like Old England," said they. "But," thinks I, "there were plenty of folks, as well as Billy the Norman, that came to England, and bettered themselves by so doing, be-

came great lords, and so on. If they kept on singing, 'No place like old Normandy, or old Saxony, or old Denmark,' they might have been small farmers or fishermen or peasants to the end of their days. The bees must swarm or starve when the hive is full. And the best service a man, that thinks he is a man, can do to England in these days is to go away from her. Let him fight her battles abroad in the new Englands, where men are scarce and land is plenty. By and by he can come back, if he prospers, and enjoy himself a little."' Here the speaker drained a glass of superb claret, and paused as he thoroughly acknowledged the flavour.

'But isn't capital needed?' inquired a young fellow, who had been rather quiet during our somewhat eager reminiscent talk. 'Is there any country, except Fiji and Fairyland, where a fellow can make a start in life without a bank account?'

'I had a ten-pound note when I landed in Sydney,' said Bunter, 'and I found it sufficient; the great thing was to get John Bunter safe over sea, and popped down in a country where there was room for him. I soon got up into the interior. There's plenty of room there, eh, Boldrewood? Blest if I saw anything but sheep, shepherds, and blackfellows for half a year together. But I didn't care; other people could do it, and John Bunter could do what any other man could do in those days. I saw what was to be got by staying in the bush, riding all day, and counting sheep till my eyes ached, and eating mutton till I hated the sight of it; I ain't too partial to it to this day; veal I can't have at any price. And by and by my turn came; I got a few sheep, and took up country for myself. And so I went on till—— But, mind you, a thousand or two is all well enough now. Times are not so good for money-

making as they were then. But no more than £2000, more's a mistake, only makes a man think he's a swell, and spoils his chance. You take a couple of thousand, Oakleigh, and if you're the chap I take you to be, you'll be a rich man in ten years.'

'Well, I can't take more, because I haven't got it,' said Oakleigh, a good-humoured, open-hearted looking youngster, whom Norman and I at once put down as 'one of the right sort,' 'but I thought it ridiculously little to go anywhere or do anything with.'

'It's too long a story to tell to-night, but you come to my chambers in the Temple to-morrow, Mr. Oakleigh, and I'll talk Australian advice to you by the yard. Now, how about the Derby? time draws on.'

'I'm a coachman now,' said Templemore; 'it's my principal occupation; by Jove! I don't know what I should do without it. I've a fancy—I told Norman here—to take a lot of fellows from the old colony, and turn out a regular "Waler" drag! What do you say, Boldrewood? You or I must drive; we're both pretty long beggars; and as it won't do to have all sorts of heights and sizes, let us pick our men over six feet. Is it agreed?'

'Done with you, old fellow—done and done!' responded from different parts of the room, where, curiously, most of the colonists happened to be up to the required standard.

'All right,' said Templemore, 'that's settled. One point more I would suggest—previous agreement upon hats and coats. Silk coats of a light shade and puggarees. I am not going to roast my few remaining brains for the sake of any British prejudice whatever.'

'Quite right too,' said Lord Beaumanoir, who had been in Australia, and most other waste places of the earth. 'Do you remember, Bunter, what an awful frizzling

got, riding across the plains, with a black boxer on, the day we went to your out-station? I got half a sunstroke, I know, and only for the blackboy's perseveringly pouring water over the back of my neck, I think it would have been a whole one. I know I kept my puggaree on in Paris, after coming back over-land, much to the astonishment of the gamins, and indeed, as far as Euston Square, where it did excite surprise. But one sunstroke's enough, eh, old boy?'

'Fashion's a good thing in its way,' returned Bunter, 'I'm not going to deny that' (he dressed rather grandly on occasions). 'But there's a time for all things; and I must say, to see a stoutish Englishman in July—and you have it pretty hot here then, and sultry too—with a black hat and black broadcloth clothes, is a thing which has given me many a laugh. I should like to put him drafting cattle for half a day.'

'Well, I do think our people are tremendously stupid,' said Lord Beaumanoir. 'Hot? of course it is hot in England, in the dog days; and yet, because of absurd prejudices about dress, people are afraid to wear healthful and becoming clothes. It's dangerous to themselves and disagreeable to spectators of their "deliquescence," as Sydney Smith said.'

'Oh! you're a leveller and a democrat and a Bohemian —we all know that,' said Sir Harry. 'I wonder why it is that fellows who have travelled much never seem to believe in anything. It must be wicked to travel—as some good people seriously believe—for the effect is to get rid, generally, of all one's faith, and nearly all of one's religion. So religion is local after all.'

'It does not seem that people should travel—to be enabled to talk nonsense, flavoured with unbelief, it would appear, Downcome? No, Harry, if prejudices are cleared, like weeds from the base of the columns, it

does not impair solidity, it merely discloses the grand proportions of the temple. But, you home-keeping English, who never go beyond the Continent of Europe, when you carry England with you, are full of prejudices, and pardon me, ignorances, that a trip round the world cures you of.'

'Travellers are never in the least conceited, I always notice that,' returned Sir Harry. 'They never think, when they return, that they have a mission to reform and improve their friends "off the face of the earth." I have a great mind to go to Australia, if only to be revenged on you, and to find you out in impositions.'

'I wish to heaven you would,' said I. 'Come back with Leslie and me, though not with the amiable intention you refer to. I think I could show you a thing or two; and there are traditions of Beaumanoir's feats, principally in the shooting way, that you could emulate.'

'It's a dreadful temptation,' said Sir Harry reflectively; 'what a delightful thing it would be to unmask such a deceiver—to go to the trusting people he had visited, and hear what he had given himself out to be. I could enlighten them, dear deluded colonists.'

'They wouldn't believe you, Harry; your expression of countenance is against you. Besides, I was as good as gold all the time—wasn't I, Bunter? It was such a nice sensation, having a character to keep up.'

'Besides the charming novelty of it,' retorted Sir Harry. 'However, I'm too old, or too lazy, to go there now—too prejudiced, as you say, in favour of ease, comfort, books, pleasant society, fair shooting, decent music, and the land where I was born. I wasn't intended for a *conquistador*. I should have stayed in

Normandy, or been a hardy Norseman to this day, if I had been my own ancestor.'

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The morning of the great British Carnival—the Derby day! Not long is the season of misrule. Englishmen cannot spare more than a day conveniently to the Abbot of Unreason. But they give themselves up heartily, and with due recklessness for the time being. It must have a fascination too, this day of joy, for the sullen race that Froissart superficially averred 'took their pleasure sadly,' and the reason which all Englishmen at home and abroad, in far foreign lands or in colonies, deem fully sufficient, whether they be mercantile or marine, civil or military, rich or poor—is a horse-race. It is the yet surviving one of the ancient games — the last of the joyous offerings to mirth which utility has spared.

It was a vast crowd to be collected only for purposes of enjoyment. But all crowds on racecourses are but enlarged agglomerations of the same units. It was the Sydney or Melbourne racecourse on a Cup day magnified. More swells, more carriages, more wealth, infinitely more poverty, more propriety, more impropriety, more horses, certainly more donkeys, and so on.

As to the great army of well-dressed, well-mannered, well-to-do people, they were as the sands of the sea—innumerable. Men in colonies are scarce—even valuable. The damsels in a country house in Australia can hardly procure the escort of an able-bodied man in their rides and drives. All their brothers and cousins and fathers and uncles are either hard at work at home, from sunrise to sunset, or else the young men have started for some station in the interior, about five hundred miles away, or have just returned from such trifling expedition. In any case, excepting that of the

most solemn holiday, Christmas day, or the election of a member for the district, all the *jeunesse dorée* is hopelessly tied to the car of duty. A professional lounger is nearly as scarce as a bushranger!

But here, in London, and in England generally, how different! Unattached, unoccupied men were in swarms and shoals, in thousands! All bore about them, if not the impress of wealth, at least that nameless air which indicates that the *res angustae domi* have never had the power to torture. But what do they, these favoured children of fortune? Do they read or write, or travel, or hew down exploded fallacies, in the abounding leisure time, it may be the abundant incomes, with which the gods have favoured them? No! They live uselessly, or wander aimlessly. They do nothing; they simply live, and having narrowed all creation to the simple fact of their quasi-pleasurable existence, they ask not, think not, know not whether there be any life more heroic, more self-abnegating, than the one which they, and thousands like them, are contented to lead.

Whatever might be the moral obligations of the integral portion of the vast holiday-making crowd, none could deny the intense pleasure which the spectacle offered to the gathered multitude. The same mad triumph seemed to fill the heart of the most stolid countryman, the humblest tradesman, the lowest rough. All classes and ages of English men and women delight in a great race. Why should the English be so sympathetic as to horse-racing, as from peer to peasant they are? Collier and carpenter, navvy and blue-jacket, soldier and ploughboy, it is all the same. They love the horse, and enjoy the sight of the great feats of speed freshly and frankly year after year. Why should the English, then, from whose insular situation and

damp climate no such fiery equine enthusiasm should be expected, be a nation of horse-tamers, next in skill to the Arabs, and in many respects excelling them.

CHAPTER XV

THE road itself was a wonder, as we swept swiftly and serenely on behind the golden chestnut thoroughbreds, which Charlie Templemore handled superbly amid the motley crowd of drags, traps, carriages, costermongers' carts—in fact, every species of wheeled conveyance possible of construction. Templemore himself was a grand-looking fair man, with mild blue eyes, a clear bronzed complexion, and a heavy blond moustache. He was a finished four-in-hand whip, and his calm air, great physical power, and matchless steering drew forth flattering remarks from the crowd.

'Master Charlie will do a kill or two to-day,' said Jack Waters, as we noticed a frank look of admiration bestowed upon our charioteer by a dark-eyed farmer's daughter in a Whitechapel, which he obligingly cleared, at the risk of running into a drag full of Guardsmen. 'I really believe the fellow picked the team to suit his own complexion. A peculiar shade of blue harmonises with both—you may remark it in his scarf and the frontlets of the nags.'

'Well, he is undeniably handsome, and just as cool as he looks. I've seen him walk about among twenty thousand miners—in revolt—when he was a gold-fields warden, seeming just as calm and careless as he is now.'

'But was there any danger?' asked I. 'Miners often "roll up," and nothing comes of it.'

'They were serious then—they would have torn the police to pieces, if one had shown out—Charlie had made them all keep inside. On the next day the diggers formed the stockade, the storming of which cost the lives of a hundred rank and file of the Queen's troops, and twice as many of their own men.'

'And he saw it all out?' said I.

'Yes,' answered Jack, 'and was always cheered, even by the mutineers. If other officials had been as popular, the blood and treasure might have been saved. But he fell in for his aunt's money afterwards, and cut the Australian civil service for good.'

'Well, Norman,' said I, as we neared the course, and saw already the enormous crowd which had encamped upon the spot, 'what do you think of all this? Is it as good as the Bunderabulla annual race meeting?'

'Upon my word, I don't know,' returned Norman. 'We shall see some grand horses, no doubt, about whose training and previous performances we know nothing. We shall view a famous race, run in very good time, and have the pleasure of contemplating a wilderness of vehicles and a world of utter strangers. All this is, no doubt, very instructive and delightful. But, if you ask me whether I feel the same joy as when I won the steeple-chase at Bunderabulla, and one of the stewards came out of the stand, and led in old Duellist, that I had bred, trained, and broken in myself; when Katie Melford galloped down with me after I had weighed to see where I took the big jump,—I say, no! most decidedly.'

'You are thinking of your youth, Norman,' said I, 'mixing up the magical past with traditional horse-racing, to the disadvantage of the Derby, which represents the present. We are not quite aged yet,

but we shall never see that again, I fear me, old friend!'

These philosophical reflections were put to flight as we approached the historical downs of Epsom, which, from our childhood, had been associated in our minds with the world's great race. We saw the vast crowd of pedestrians massed on the edge of the course, and as eager of the event as if their fortunes depended upon it. We marked the array of carriages and drags, which had already commenced to *corral*—to use a Spanish-American word—and, having despatched their horses, were converted into fortresses, garrisoned with distracting damsels, and victualled as for a siege.

'Suppose we take a turn round the saddling paddock,' said Templemore, who was mildly interested in his book; 'I have been sweeter than usual upon that Yorkshire horse, and I want to see if he looks as big as ever.'

So we adjourned to that enclosure, and saw the twenty-seven spoilt children of the equine world that were to stretch every sinew, and to considerably accelerate their heart-action, for the 'blue ribbon of the turf.'

'By Jove!' said Norman, 'what a lot of beauties! How I should like to have that Brown Duchess at Bunderabulla. What an aristocrat she is! Calm and stately, with a look of sense controlling sensibility; temperate, I'll be bound. I don't care about small horses, they're like small people—irritable and undignified.'

'Nonsense,' I retorted, 'you're forgetting Alexander the Great, Napoleon the First, Nelson, and a heap of others. Small and middle-sized horses, and men of the same dimensions, have done most of the feats of speed and endurance that have been recorded. But there is

something in your theory as to calmness. Look at Thormanby! There's power, shape, and speed! I shall see him in my dreams.'

Why should it be an acknowledged fact that the Englishman has brought the thoroughbred horse to a perfection, for form, beauty, and fleetness, utterly unapproached in the whole world? It has so long been the case that it seems a thing of course. But why so? The island home of that strangely-compounded entity of many races, of various blood—the Englishman—is cold and damp, naturally as unsuited to the heat-enjoying courser, whose ancestors snuffed the burning breezes of the desert, as a salt marsh is to a pine-apple. But the Englishman desired a fleet horse—and he has got him; a large horse, to bear up the vast limbs and mighty frames of the men of his race—and he has got him; a strong horse, to cross the high and wide enclosures of his island fields—and he has got him. No horse that the world produces is confessedly so strong, so fleet, so beautiful as the thoroughbred horse of England and England's colonies. The Arab, the founder and parent of the race, is a beautiful pony; his courage, his symmetry, and his endurance are as unimpeachable now as in the days of the Ishmaelite sheikhs. But his speed, when compared to that of the English horse, is as the cat's beside the greyhound; his strength as that of the goat beside the deer. And where else but in England could be found the precise type and breed of men fitted to train and ride these favourites of the animal creation? Surely a well-taught English servant, connected with a training establishment, approaches perfection as far as this lower nature of ours permits. Active, resolute, trustworthy; slight, but strong and brave; faultlessly dressed, and with manners to match—what a product of civilisation does

he present! As we saw Custance, Fordham, and their neatly yet brilliantly attired brethren approach their several mounts preparatory to the start, we felt our obligation to that society which had developed the type, and secured its acclimatisation in the far land of our birth.

'I think we're all pretty sweet on Thormanby,' said Templemore, as we returned to our carriage. 'The drag generally stands to win on him. As for me, I've been a bad boy, and backed him for more than I'd care to own. But whether I land it or not, it shan't happen again. Betting is all very well in moderation, but hang gambling! it's a bottomless pit, with the devil at the lower levels—if that functionary takes any interest in our being sent to *bed* by art, before Dame Nature's ready for us.'

'Charlie's quite overpowering this morning,' quoth Jack Waters. 'Whence this high moral tone? Do you stand a shot, so dangerously "continental"? are you going into the church? or is Charlie Templemore in love at last? What would the Sydney girls say to that?'

'I suppose the faintest approach to reason is inappropriate on a day specially devoted to folly. I'll tell you some other time why I shall drop the cheerful loo and the fascinating piquet in future. But let us look at the start—they're off! No! false start, of course. How could there be a race without a dozen false starts?

> They will not be quiet, the sun
> Streameth down
> On black and on chestnut, on
> Bay and on brown.

Certainly, they will not be quiet; look at that hysterical colt, how he rears and plunges, and would be just

in his right place if his tail were not where his head should be. The great Yorkshire steed is quiet enough —calm with the mighty strength that enables the gladiator to walk erect, and sole survivor, across the arena, soaked with the heart's blood of comrades. Well, a horse too can dare death unflinchingly. They're off, no—yes, yes. *Off!*'

We saw a great race. Saw the satin-skinned crowd flash by, like the dream coursers of an unresting night. Heard the thunder-roll of their hoofs as they neared the goal, and marked the eager faces of those who hoped fortune, or dared ruin, as the fickle gift of speed might go. Saw despair, ashen-hued, steal over more than one white face, and heard the roar of the frantic crowd, the bursting cheer of the Yorkshire tykes, as the mighty chestnut came through his horses in the last struggle, and won 'hands down.' Saw Colonel Altamont (of the bodyguard of His Highness the Nawaub) leap frantically upon the roof of his drag; heard Overdue murmur, 'God help my poor wife!' as he fell back fainting. Lady Clara Vere de Vere proclaimed that she had won gloves enough to last her for a year, and Charlie Templemore's face relaxed from its somewhat serious expression, as the numbers went up. Then lunch was declared, and the demon of anxiety was exorcised for the present. Tablecloths were spread, hampers unpacked, knives and forks were mysteriously produced, champagne flowed, and the sad modern heart was lightened. Just in front of us, among the occupants of a lofty drag, I recognised the tones of a well-known voice, as it hailed me in friendly greeting. I beheld an old Australian acquaintance, Strongbowe. There he was, as loud, as joyous, as romantically inaccurate as ever.

'How are you, old fellow?' he cried out, waving his

hat, as, descending, he greeted me as a long-lost brother. 'Came down from the Rag with Maunder of the Guards, Sir Edward Bloster, and a lot of other swells. They would have me. Going to hunt next season? I shall. Must give the Duke another turn; good fellow the Duke! One day at dinner I was doing it a little heavy with the liberal ticket—must go with the times, you know. What do you think the Duke said?—"Why, Strongbowe, you've changed your politics since you were among us last." Capital, wasn't it, and devilish quick of him to remember I'd been a Conservative last time I'd been in England. Heard from your father lately? My agent mentioned him; said he heard he sold two thousand bullocks off that Bandoddah run for £15 a head.'

'Hope he has,' said I, 'but he didn't tell me. Had any good shooting, Strongbowe?'

'First-rate. Went down with Lord George Grandston to that swell lodge of Bunter's in Scotland. Bunter awfully glad to have George, I can tell you; made some terrific bags. I managed top score with that old double-barrel of mine; you remember her in the quail season out there, don't you?'

CHAPTER XVI

'PERFECTLY well, my dear Strongbowe; I am charmed to find that she, and the other weapon, are in such first-rate shooting condition. Have some lunch?'

'Can't really, old boy; those fellows would never get on without me. Seen Grassdale and his daughters, of Cape Blank, in the Park lately? They tell me he

has fifty thousand a year, and that any man who marries one of the girls will have thirty thousand down on his wedding-day.'

'I wish he may get it,' said I; 'the income must be considerably stretched, and the dower is decidedly algebraic, I should say—judging from Grassdale's temper—an unknown quantity.'

'Well, I must really go. See Lord Errington up there? Lady E. not bad-looking, is she? Ha! there's George shouting for me—good-bye, old fellow—got a good coachman? Look out for squalls—awful crush back.'

Here my well-informed but inventive friend tore himself away. He was an Australian who, so far from being looked down upon on that score, had made good his social foothold here upon eminences that in the colonies he would never have ventured to climb. He was very well off, hospitable and good-natured. These were his strong points. In the rest he was not clever or well read, though amusing, while his habitual exaggerations had procured him an alliterative prefix which indicated a Scottish severity of condemnation. He was not more than tolerated in the best colonial circles, while in society here he was quite at his ease among people of acknowledged rank and fashion, and had obtained entrance into a leading club, by no means facile of access. Like Bunter, a very different, and in most respects a superior man, Strongbowe's peculiarities, not to say solecisms, were treated with the lenity extended to a foreigner.

He was not the only compatriot whom I encountered that day. It is astonishing how one knocks against Australians everywhere. Next to Americans, they will one day be the most numerous Anglo-Saxon travellers. The superfine Anglican tourist then will

shudder at the English-looking, English-speaking stranger, whom he doubts as a Victorian, or fears as a New Yorker. I saw the jolly face of Warden, tanned by the suns of the innermost desert, but the blue eyes were steadfast as ever. He and his graceful wife, with the boys from Rugby, were evidently in full enjoyment of the day. I saw the long, spare, sun-dried form of Benson Beanstalk, Esq., J.P., of Lower Oxley, Back Blockham, Outer Mullah, and so on, like myself, 'taking a run home.' He did not in one respect resemble me. 'He had had,' he said, 'quite enough of it—England was a slow place—a stiff place, and awfully cold. London was not more amusing, though bigger and blacker, than Sydney or Melbourne. He didn't think the horses so awfully good, either. If they were in Australia, he would back Lee and Reynolds' stud, and old John Bate's training, against them any day. I am afraid cattle are going to be very low in our part of the country, Boldrewood,' he said; 'the last letter from my agent (and he's a sharp fellow) says something about boiling down prices. I don't like the look of it, and I shall be off next mail, or the one after. Good-bye! Hope we shall meet on the Oxley, and draft cattle again together.'

'Amen!' said I, and he went solemnly on his way.

Here was another variation of the type. The true bush-reared, bush-bred 'native' of the second, perhaps of the third, generation of born Australians, he has never done anything since the very early period at which he left school, but ride after, draft, brand, buy, sell, or think about cattle. They were, with a slight exception in favour of horses, the chief end of man, the great aim of existence. He was really, at all times, seasons, and occupations, bored when not actually 'out

on the run.' That was the main occupation of his life. To sit upon a horse from sunrise (or earlier) to sunset, or even midnight, driving or expecting to drive cattle, was to him pleasure, peace, contentment—daily duty and sufficing recreation all combined. Other hopes or fears, abstract interests or personal ambition, had he none. He could read, write, and cipher respectably. Also a fair grammar-school education; but reading was an accomplishment that, once acquired, he had, like some contemporary young ladies, neglected to keep up. He was manly, athletic, brave, and honourable. But early habit, and perhaps hereditary predisposition, had narrowed his sphere of action, and obliterated æsthetic sympathies. I had seen him cheerful enough in a lonely camp at midnight, or crossing a swollen river in winter on a single sheet of bark. But here, in the heart of civilisation, at the headquarters of luxury, intellectual and material, he was solitary, morose, *ennuyé*.

I was nearly run down by an impetuous charge made by the enthusiastic occupant of a neighbouring drag, in which every one seemed to be in the highest possible spirits.

'My dear sir,' I expostulated, opposing a 'football shoulder' which checked the onward progress of my friend, rather abruptly, 'do you ever look before you?'

'Me dear man,' responds he, in a mellifluous Milesian accent, 'if I didn't, I shouldn't be here. Sure it was looking too far ahead intirely that bothered me just now. Would ye oblige me by telegraphing to the ould gintleman, talking to the pretty widow there, that his daughter's waiting for him, and may be starving at this moment; for I can't persuade her to take bit or sup till he comes?'

'Why, O'Grady!' said I, 'you must have lost your persuasive powers since you left Australia. You could

sell a run or a lot of store cattle for more money, in less time, than any man I ever saw.'

'Sir!' said the stranger, with studied coldness, 'you have the advantage of me. I am not aware that I have ever had the honour, in Australia or elsewhere, of meeting—ha! Boldrewood, ye divil! sure it's yourself! I never heard ye were home. I've been down in Galway (in the bush you may say, between ourselves) and came up to see the Derby. But I'm delighted to meet ye. Come home with me, me boy! I'm buying land there. I'm getting a small estate together—I'm going to marry and settle. I'm going—yes, I, Maurice O'Grady, the largest station holder in Australia—I'm going to lower myself to the level of purchased land.'

'Well, I'll see, O'Grady. I'm due for a visit to old Ireland. In the meantime——'

'In the meantime, come and have a glass of champagne. I see that ould divil, Dillon Blake, drawing back to the mob—eh, ye cornstalk?'

'Come over — listen — and I'll introduce you to Isidora Blake—isn't she the beauty of the world? Honour bright! now don't ye cut me out, ye big villain, with that hay-coloured beard of yours.'

O'Grady bore me over to his carriage, and introduced me to the fair Irish girl whom he had, as I promptly confessed, by no means untruly described. A glorious creature. She had the characteristic loveliness of the sister isle—dark blue eyes with black hair; a complexion impossible to emulate in any land more distant from 'the mournful and misty Atlantic'; a mobile, mirthful, ruby-lipped mouth, filled with pearls, and doubtless ready to drop diamonds. I was dazzled, certainly, and on being introduced subsequently to her sister Harriet, and to the père Blake, so disrespectfully

anathematised by O'Grady, from whom I immediately received the warmest invitation to spend two or three months at Mount Blake, I caught myself calculating as to whether my engagements would permit a trip to Ireland—'a most interesting country, which I had always intended to visit.'

'Well, that's settled, settled!' said O'Grady, with the bold decision by which he had so often clenched an advantageous stock bargain; 'and we'll show him some hunting, Miss Blake. He *can* ride, to do him justice; still, I'd like to show him a Galway hunter topping a five-foot wall—not but what a three-railed fence is a worse leap.'

'A worse leap, Mr. O'Grady?—and you a Galway man,' said the queenly Isidora reproachfully, bending on the candid speaker a look of soft reproach which would have made me swear that an iron-bark top-rail was safer than a stake-bound hurdle; 'I wonder you can look me in the face and say so.'

O'Grady was a queer fellow. Arithmetical and mathematical above everything. In spite of his brogue, he had as little imagination as a Scotchman, and his vast speculations in Australia owed their success to an astonishing financial accuracy, combined with a forecast as unerring as audacious. So he was not to be dislodged from his proposition about three-railed fences, even by the raillery of so fair a lady.

'Miss Blake, I have many a time knocked a stone off the top of a big wall, and neither horse nor man was a bit the worse for it. An Irish hunter knows he can give and take, and now and then touches a wall with fore or hind legs. But a three-railed fence must be jumped clean, to the last inch; and if that inch is missed, down go horse and man, as if they had struck an iron bar. That's the difference. But sure

if Miss Harriet there had "Fingal" in Australia, she'd show them all the way, three-railers and all.'

'You'll make Mr. Boldrewood think we do nothing else but hunt when we're at home,' said the fair Harriet, a graceful, piquante damsel—not so lovely as her sister, but sufficiently attractive in her own style. 'We don't live on horseback any more than Australian young ladies do, I suppose, Mr. Boldrewood?'

'I can easily understand that,' said I. 'O'Grady, like all travellers, regards our far country with respect, as furnishing the material for innumerable travellers' tales. But I have heard of Galway hunters all my life. Well up too in Lever and Maxwell.'

'Come and see for yourself,' said Isidora Blake, with one flash of her marvellous eyes that was an oration in itself, and settled the question irrevocably. 'Come and see the Wild West and its inhabitants; we'll be so glad to have you at Mount Blake.' (Here Mr. Blake renewed his entreaties for a half-year or so of my invaluable society.) Miss Harriet looked eagerly at me with the warmest welcome written on every line of her face.

'Sure ye'll come,' concluded Miss Blake; 'I see it in your face.'

She spoke truly. I gazed into the depths of those wondrous eyes for one moment, and vowed mentally that this should not be our last meeting.

'See here now,' said O'Grady, 'the grooms are busy with Charlie Templemore's chestnuts, and they won't wait long, I know. You've just time for a glass of champagne and a solemn leave-taking—now we're quite old friends. Here's to our next meeting—west of Athlone—and we'll do our best to make an Irishman of him, eh, Miss Harriet?'

'Going to Australia from Ireland improves some

people,' retorted that young lady. 'I don't know whether the reverse journey has the same effect.'

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The last race was over. The day was done. Ruin had settled darkly upon many a heart—the raven was croaking 'Nevermore!' in tones which no madness of wine or carnival recklessness could still. Sudden wealth and undeserved fortune intoxicated others, while, under the excitement of the hour, dreams were mounting to the sky—visions of ideal happiness, Ossa upon Pelion—to the very clouds of that roseate heaven.

Mad or mirthful, melancholy or desperate, joyous or ruined, as individuals might be, the vast crowd took flight citywards. Onward with them we passed, the blood chestnuts snatching at their bits, as they swept on through the labyrinth of vehicles, with an eagerness and pace which were a subtle reflex of the roused organisms of their passengers.

At first we were not able to make much headway. But from time to time Templemore descried an opening in the ranks, and racing desperately for it, generally managed to effect a fresh lead. Just after one of these excursions, we observed an aggressive Cockney throw a firework of some kind into a vehicle in which sat a squarely-built man and a lady attired with considerable splendour. The cracker exploded; the lady shrieked. We pulled up as the squarely-built man stopped his horse just in front of us and jumped out. He made one stride over to the offending Londoner, and, seizing him by the collar, swung him out of his trap as a poulterer lifts a rabbit from a hutch. Dragging the cowed 'Arry—he was of that persuasion evidently, and a stout fellow enough—over to the carriage where sat the dame, still hysterical, he

hurled him on his knees, saying, 'Beg her pardon, you son of a gun, or *I'll* twist your head off, as sure as my name's Tom Sayers.' That young man did as he was told. I may add that he showed no desire, after this realistic address, to break the peace.

This little matter caused slight delay and a block, after which the gallant Tom, loudly cheered, went his way. The person who had caught so pronounced a Tartar also went *his* way soberly, possibly somewhat modified as to his taste for indiscriminate practical joking.

'Come to Cremorne to-night, Rolf?' said Templemore, 'we're all going; it's rather funny the night of the Derby day.'

'Well, Charlie, it will probably not look to any great advantage after Mabille and the "Closerie de Lilacs." However, I'm not sure that I shall be long in England, so I'll go.'

This being settled, we dined together at the Wellington, and after the second cigar adjourned to Cremorne, not altogether indisposed for whatever excitement or adventure might present itself. The dinner had been eminently successful; the talk joyous, if not brilliant, while our party had 'stood' Thormanby, and won largely. Altogether, we were in that frame of mind which, perfectly satisfied with the present, superadds a certain element of recklessness befitting a season of carnival.

When we arrived, the scene resembled a translation to another and not a better world. A large proportion of the revellers had been at the great race; their manners reflected with tolerable fidelity their various fortunes. Many were in the highest possible state of exhilaration, eagerly joining in everything that promised amusement.

Some, whose corroding despair wine had failed to banish, stalked through the brilliant scene and the excited crowd, gloomy and silent as the lost souls in the Hall of Eblis. Others, again, in a kind of medium or purgatorial condition, were not averse to conversation, but were so soured and irritable that it was evident that the inevitable climax to their emotions would be a row of some sort. The majority, like our own party, regarded the whole affair as a spectacle chiefly devised for their amusement, and gazed at the brilliant assemblage, the ingenious entertainments, the dancers and the demi-monde, with apparently the same undiscriminating curiosity.

The general effect was novel, and distinctly striking. The rank and file of pleasure-seekers did not, perhaps, devote themselves to the dance with the passionate eagerness of Frenchmen. They did not bound or scream, and tear round the room in the mad abandon of a Parisian masked ball, when the 'Galop d'Enfer' strikes up. But there was no lack of fun.

The admixture of social strata was, of itself, curiously abnormal. Peers and parvenus, dukes and dancing girls, baronets and betting men, swells, cads, tradesmen, sharpers, countrymen, cockneys, lords, and lorettes, all appeared to be enjoying themselves unaffectedly. From this realm the dread spectre of Mrs. Grundy had been effectually banished. Men of all ranks met in this unreal 'londe of Faerye,' danced, jested, and made light love to the Cynthias of the minute, under the magic sheen of the 'love lamps in the casements hung,' or by 'Mnemosyne's statue so fair.' All was then 'music and passion and light'—to change with the unkind dawn into the harsh outlines and austere manners of everyday life.

One of the wonders of the night was the number of

accidental meetings, as friends or foes, from the hither or farther world. You ran against people that you had last seen in Paris, in New Zealand, or India, or Kamtchatka, as the case might be. There stood an acquaintance that Leslie and I had made at Mabille—we had seen him at the 'Closerie de Lilacs' and the 'Chaumière,' and now here he was at Cremorne. Did he pass his life in evening visits to these entertaining but not improving places? Was he 'formerly in the army,' as he had stated to us? or had he no morals to signify, and thus escaped deterioration?

Templemore, Beaumanoir, and I, perhaps the least actively employed of our party, had been sitting together with Sir Harry Downcome at one of the café tables watching the dancers.

Sir Harry and I were having rather a learned ethnological discussion, which had arisen out of an assertion that none of the families of men descended from British colonists were equal in physique and stamina to the stock from whence they sprang. He quoted Knox and Pritchard, with other authorities, and seemed much satisfied with the manner in which he had fortified his proposition.

'Of course, present company excepted, and all that, Boldrewood!' he said. 'You won't need any apologies, I know; of course, I am only declaring what I believe to be abstract truth. You are big and broad enough in all conscience, so it can't apply to you; but you must own that you and a few others are exceptions to my rule.'

'My dear Sir Harry,' said I, 'don't think I could be offended by any honest opinion. I merely wish to remark that I could lay my hand, in any of the colonies, on a score of men who could lift you in one hand and me in the other and knock our heads

together, were they seriously moved to wrath. You do not—pardon me—make sufficient allowance for the purity of Australian air, the healthful activity of colonial life, and the overflowing abundance of the most nutritive and expensive diet in the world, to which all classes are accustomed from childhood.'

CHAPTER XVII

'ALL that sounds well, my dear Boldrewood,' replied my unconvinced opponent, 'but look at the Americans. They have formed a complete and perfectly defined type, subject to but few variations, and differing as much from the ordinary Englishman as the Spaniard or the Italian; and as to physique, where are they? But for the ceaseless importation of European immigrants, the race would die out, being incapable of adequate reproduction.'

'Now, don't quote any more Knox to me,' I interposed. 'I have read all the old theorist has said about the mysterious law that forbids the perpetuation of the choicer kinds of mankind in lands far superior in climate and soil to the mother country, and I disbelieve it all!'

'Do you really affirm that a Yankee is physically equal to an Englishman? for, if so, I have no more to say.'

'I say nothing of the sort; but doubtless you are aware that in the magnificent continent which men call North America there are several dozen habitats differing in climate, social life, and all other respects nearly as widely as Demerara and Dublin. While,

therefore, I admit that the inhabitants of the eastern states and cities are often meagre as to physique, when you go south or west you see some of the grandest specimens of Anglo-Saxon humanity which any land could have produced. So in Australia,—hallo! what the deuce is that?—a row, and a serious one, too,—come along!'

Our philosophical discussion terminated abruptly as we walked hastily to where the crowd was massing itself near the main entrance, towards which we had for some time past been gradually trending.

We had sacrificed to the *genius loci* to a certain degree, at any rate, each of us as having sought out some amusement. Norman Leslie was enthusiastically fond of dancing, and under favourable circumstances nothing but the absence of women and music could possibly have diverted him from his favourite recreation. He was spinning about with a damsel of prepossessing appearance and affable manners when he was suddenly run into by a heavily-built fellow whose momentum was so great that Master Norman and his partner were spread out on the floor, and the fair damsel so seriously discomposed that she was unable to go on. Leaving her seated, Norman departed for a reconnaissance, and, presenting himself before the delinquent, demanded of him that he should instantly apologise.

The man he addressed, a low-browed, clean-shaved, bullet-headed betting man, was renowned among his intimates for unusual cleverness with his hands—an art, by the way, in which the ring is well up as a class, their line of life rendering it desirable that they should be able, upon occasion, thus to terminate arguments successfully. Now this respectable individual had laid heavily against Thormanby, and having come out badly, and taken more brandy than was good for him,

was in a state of smouldering ferocity which only needed a spark or, as he phrased it, 'a bit of cheek from some infernal swell,' to cause him to blaze forth into fiery wrath, with a conviction that his mission was to destroy any member of the hated class that had profited by his ruin to-day. Meeting Norman's blue eyes, in which shone the light of battle, with the steady gaze which denotes the trained pugilist, he broke forth into language so foul and insulting that Norman said but the words, 'Put up your hands!' and went at him.

In a second the crowd closed round, a ring was formed, and the spectators watched with cheerful interest that spectacle which appears never to lose its interest for Britons, and which, in all deference to the proprieties be it spoken, I trust never will.

Joe Robinson was a 'good man' in the somewhat restricted sense intended by his compeers who thus described him. He was tough, obstinate, fearless, and cunning of fence, while his broad frame, and somewhat low-sized and enormous limbs, denoted great muscular power. He was therefore, so to speak, 'good,' but not quite good enough for the best man (with the gloves) 'on the Three Rivers,' a reputation that Norman had enjoyed from his earliest manhood in his own country. His activity was wonderful, his science complete and modern, his strength much greater than was apparent, so that when Joe Robinson learned from the lightning rapidity and perfect accuracy of the first 'cross-counter' that he had a workman to deal with, he schooled his blind rage into a species of malignant caution, and watched warily for a chance of inflicting a crushing blow. That chance never came. The youth, activity, and consummate skill of his antagonist were more than a match for his superior weight and strength. It soon became evident that the Australian

was 'forcing the pace,' and that the 'metallician' had once more laid against the wrong horse.

We had closed up by this time, and gone the length of an encouraging word or two to Norman, while a compact body of ring men and turf roughs supported their man, and hurled defiance at their betters, after the manner of their kind.

At the outer edge of the ring, nearest our party, sat two men, somewhat *soignés* as to their apparel, smoking quietly at one of the café tables, who, not being nervous apparently, had declined to move when the battle was imminent. They sat in their places calmly, and watched the affair without intermission of talk or tobacco. Sooth to say, they did not look like persons likely to come by harm in any affray from which gunpowder was excluded. The crowd forbore to press upon them, evidently taking it for granted that they were exhibiting an intelligent interest in the affair, and were qualified to criticise. When we commenced to observe them, we agreed with the popular opinion.

'We were talking about men,' I said to Sir Harry; 'look at those two fellows—good average physique, eh?'

'By my respected ancestor, by the Lord Harry,' said he, 'I should say so. Why, the taller man is as near seven feet as six, I dare swear, and the shorter one, comparatively short only, must measure about fifty inches round the chest. They are sunburnt, too. If they are born colonists, my theory is dashed to the ground.'

'I don't know them personally,' said I, 'but I've heard of two compatriots of mine whom they resemble, and if so, we may, perhaps, see the "Black Knight" do his devoir in the *mêlée* that looks so probable, and I humbly trust that he will be beside, and not opposite to you and me.'

As I spoke, the short contest, which had been drawing to a close, was abruptly ended. Norman had for some time been beating a sort of 'devil's tattoo' upon his opponent's ribs, eluding with practised ease the terrific blows aimed at his own person. The shorter spectator looked on approvingly.

'That ought to make him lower his arms,' said he, thoughtfully; 'who the deuce is that light-haired fellow?—strikes me I've seen him on the Narran.'

'Very neat and quick, whoever he is,' said the tall man; 'about half a round more will do for the "bold Briton," and then I think we'd better go home. Hulloa!'

This last exclamation was elicited by the fact that, just as the speaker had decided upon the highly respectable course of conduct which would have removed him and his friend from temptation, and enshrined them in the sacred precincts of their hotel, the Australian made a successful feint with his right hand, and almost simultaneously struck his opponent a terrific blow with his left, full upon the temple. Robinson fell across the outstretched legs of the tall man, who merely drew himself back and permitted the form of the gambler to fall heavily at full length. He lay prone and senseless. Leslie looked at his hand, and shrugging his shoulders, stood quietly alongside of his friends. The defeated candidate was lifted up and restored to animation. Such valuable members of society are always aided by the fiend-patron of their profession.

'Why, Norman,' said the tall stranger, in tones of sweet reproof, 'surely my eyes deceive me? or do I behold the peaceable and magisterial Norman Leslie brawling in a public place—in a strange country—dancing, drinking, and fighting, "like the beasts that perish," as dear George Eliot says; bringing discredit,

too, upon our native land? I'm ashamed of you; or, rather, I should have been if you had not camped that cad so neatly.'

'Don't talk nonsense, Aymer!' retorted Norman, whose Highland blood had not as yet cooled down; 'but do you and M'Callum there get up and strike in, if you are not too lazy, for I'll be hanged if these fellows intend to let us out without a rally.'

The crowd, which now gathered excitedly between us and the outer door, wroth at the discomfiture of their champion, commenced to press around with menacing words and gestures. At that moment, a rough-looking fellow sprang forward and knocked Leslie's hat off, which fell under the feet of the trampling opposition.

The tall stranger rose with an alacrity which contrasted sharply with his previous calm, not to say apathetic, demeanour, and stretching over the heads of half-a-dozen persons, secured a good-looking new hat, which he handed to Leslie with much politeness. An instant and hostile rush was the consequence of this reprisal, upon which we all ranged in line and faced for the door, with the full intention of fighting our way out, maugre the odds and the extreme impropriety of the whole proceeding.

The inmates of the 'Waler drag' were considerably above the average height, which was just as well, as matters now presented themselves. We were a grenadier company facing one of the line, and felt a certain advantage, as we looked down upon our excited adversaries. The crowd was dense, however, and we knew enough of the general obstinacy of Englishmen of all ranks to feel assured that, unless assisted by unusual good luck, we stood a great chance of being well thrashed all round.

We were not long in suspense. A powerful man, who looked like a strayed coal-heaver, came through the front rank and made straight for the tall man. Another heavy-weight singled out the shorter stranger, while each man of our party found an antagonist barring his outward path. I was fortunate in having a rather plethoric bookmaker opposite me, upon whose plump carcass I delivered my one, two mechanically, though I could not help looking at the two strangers.

High above all the struggling, ignoble crowd rose the tall form of Aymer Brandon, as Norman called him. Perfectly proportioned, broad, muscular, graceful, and delicate of finish, he looked like the mail-clad knight among the leathern-jerkined men-at-arms—like the lion among the mastiffs.

He played with his burly antagonist for a short time—never removing the short meerschaum from his lips. It was sufficient for him to raise his head and hold out his arm to place himself beyond the reach of his adversary, who, by feints and springs and sudden bursts of in-fighting, strove to get within his guard. Apparently warming to the fray, and carefully replacing his pipe, Brandon called to his companion—'Now then, Jack!' and the grand charge was made.

Wholly incapable of parrying or returning the blows which dropped with dazzling rapidity upon every part of his unprotected person, the 'lost leader' mechanically stopped one straight left-hander with his head, and went down with considerable emphasis. M'Callum's victim was pretty helpless about the same time, and the two flung themselves like Berserkers upon the undecided mob. It was clearly evident that they united very finished instruction to extraordinary strength, and being now fully agitated, the way the *canaille* fell before them was a thing to remember. We all, I

humbly trust, did our devoir as knights and gentles, but we could scarce keep the requisite look-out for watching the foe go down like ninepins. When M'Callum was fairly started, in a thick place, it seemed as if every man whom he struck knocked down a couple of others by the sheer momentum of his fall. As for Aymer Brandon, to use Downcome's phrase, who was lost in admiration, 'they lay kicking all around him'; while Norman Leslie, with a cut across his forehead bleeding profusely, fought like a demon, forgetting his injured hand. Templemore, calm as ever, exhibited the skill which had more than once astonished a refractory digger; while Beaumanoir, with his jolly face wreathed with smiles, swore it was the best fun he had had since he left Eton.

We had gradually been facing the crowd towards the embouchure of that portion of the place in which we were. We had kept our ranks and had never given back an inch. We made one desperate effort, broke the opposing line, and making good our sortie, found ourselves at liberty and in the open air.

A legion of hansom cabs was in attendance. We disappeared into their recesses, and gave the word 'home—go like blazes.' I think a stray policeman may have accidentally stumbled across a sovereign or two—but we made our retreat in good order, carrying the hat with us, now proudly reposing, a little the worse for wear, upon the curly locks of Norman Leslie.

. . . . . .

A few days, I thought, would suffice for preliminary arrangements and for taking leave of my fair cousins. These sympathetic relatives affected to regard my 'little tour in Ireland' as an expedition fraught with danger. Even my uncle had misgivings as to my personal welfare.

'I've never been to Ireland, my boy, and never mean to go,' said he decisively, 'although I have a property there, from which, I must say, I get the rents pretty regularly. It's not a step to be lightly taken. I might arrive just as my agent had raised the rents, or dispossessed some fellow who hadn't paid up for a generation. And it's not a pleasant idea, as you ride along the Queen's highway, that some emissary of an illegal association is hammering the flint of a rusty carbine, and taking a sitting shot at you, by way of balancing your grandfather's account, or the stern policy of Oliver Cromwell. I must say I prefer Giles Chawbacon here, who may not possess high social qualities, and grumbles occasionally, but to whom it does not occur to redress historical wrongs by assassination.'

'My dear sir,' I answered, 'you must be thinking of '98 or the landing of Hoche. All these ideas are matters of tradition. Ireland is improving (I am told) at a wonderful pace, and between emigration and the increased rate of wages, Paddy is as peaceable as his brother Britons, and far more warm-hearted.'

'I don't care about his warm-heartedness,' quoth the unconvinced senior. 'I want people to do their duty in their state of life, and so on. That is more satisfactory in the end, and as for the improvement, look there.'

I took *The Times*, which he handed me as he spoke, and read as follows:—'We regret to state that another of the agrarian outrages, unhappily so common in Ireland, occurred last week. Mr. Alexander Saunderson, the factor of a gentleman who lately purchased an estate in Donegal and commenced extensive agricultural improvements, was found brutally murdered last Thursday. The unfortunate gentleman was accus-

tomed to go armed, and his revolver lay near, with one chamber discharged. His skull was beaten in, and life had been extinct for some hours when he was discovered. No clue exists as to the murderers.'

'Well, Rolf, how about '98 and Oliver Cromwell?' asked the old gentleman; 'that looks as if a fine old custom had not yet died out, eh?'

'It certainly does,' I assented, somewhat unwillingly, 'but one swallow does not make a summer. Perhaps there was a wholesale eviction; and after all, people are shot, though not for the same reason, quite as near home. There was that clergyman, for instance, in Warwickshire the other day, mortally wounded by Bill Sykes; he having waked up and discovered that typical London operative in his bedroom, with a crape-disguised countenance.'

'True enough, Rolf, but the proportion of burglars is not large in a population of thirty millions; and our murders are generally for reasons which can be understood and guarded against: you have no defence against a sentimental homicide.'

'Now, dear papa,' interposed Gwen, 'haven't you discovered that Rolf is a little—just a little, obstinate—it's a Boldrewood characteristic, I believe. Do you know a dear old gentleman who, when he makes up his mind, can never, never be turned? So we'll drop the Whiteboy question. Perhaps there's a fair lady in the case. Was that Miss Blake pretty, that you saw at the Derby? It strikes me you said suspiciously little about her. Are you going to visit them?'

'Well,' I said, divesting my countenance of every ray of expression, 'I may look them up if I stay in the west. Old Blake was so jolly and pressing in his invitation.'

'Daresay he was,' said my uncle; 'I think I've

heard of Dillon Blake in London—I forget what, however. You've cut your wisdom teeth, Rolf—they seem to come early in the colonies—or I'd tell you not to take him for the Knight of Gwynne, or the warm-hearted, chivalrous, Irish country gentleman of the period—straight out of Lever's best novel—until you know something of him. Times are changed in Ireland, people say, and they think as much there of money and a tight settlement as ever they did in this lawyer-ridden England of ours.'

'My dear sir, you have a little prejudice against the Green Isle; but it can't be worth any one's while to conspire against my undistinguished self. I hope to enjoy a tour in an interesting country. For the rest, I must take my chance, and I shall be loaded with facts on the Irish question when I return.'

'You'll never come back alive,' announced my younger cousin decisively,—'that is, unmarried, I mean. Those Irish girls are awfully dangerous at close quarters; and when you are shut up in one of their ruinous barracks of castles you'll be taken out hunting and fishing, and flattered and petted, until you lose that remarkably cool head of yours. Besides, you *must* propose, or fight all the brothers, besides the first and second cousins. Make your last adieux. You'll return no more—unappropriated.'

'You are wicked, suspicious, naughty girls,' I answered with counterfeited wrath, 'and I'll bring back a wife with the finest brogue I can discover, just to punish you.'

'Bring over a couple of hunters, that will be a safer investment,' said my uncle. 'They are certainly the best jumpers, as to height, I ever saw—for water they have hardly the stride. But, joking apart, Rolf, you are old enough to please yourself, and whenever you

please to marry, we shall be pleased to entertain your wife—eh, girls?'

'Papa, you're an accessary before the fact—as I heard you say in your justice-room one day,' said Gwen, with a stern expression on her pretty face that was immensely piquante, and indeed set me thinking whether, after all, it was worth while to go so far afield on the chance of a 'possible princess' while one so very good, pretty, clever, and well-bred was so close at hand. Would she take me? I was not coxcomb enough to be morally certain about that. Still, if I wished to try in earnest I had reasonable ground for hope. But a cousin, a first cousin! had I not always set my face against such alliances?

No, a hundred times no. Besides philosophical reasons, the great fact remains that love, the untamed —the untamable—will neither be driven, led, nor directed. Virtue will not restrain him always, though vice may repel. He passes by the abode of all the talents, the splendour of beauty, the mild radiance of the graces, and kneels, passion-pale, before some lowly altar, casting his heart's best treasures at the feet of some forest maiden, some Undine, some being half earth, half fire, whose nameless charm has fired the electric current that transfuses his being.

Which, being interpreted, means that I had vowed to myself, by fair means or foul, to see Isidora Blake once more; and that by day and by night, musing or mirth-making, I was haunted by the clear depths of those 'marvellous eyes, like seas clear-coloured by summer skies,' and that regal form—delicate, stately, supple—the like of which had never before met my gaze!

After fullest consideration, and the very last smoke of all, I concluded not to invade the sister isle until

the middle of the hunting season. There was no particular reason, except restlessness and infatuation, for premature emigration. Such feelings I could control, so I determined to have some cub-hunting in England before I went to tempt providence in the land of 'ould Giles Eyre,' Baby Blake, and other traditionary characters. My cousins became quite demonstrative, for them, when informed of what they were pleased to term my reprieve, and joy reigned at Boldrewood Chase.

From that time until the closing autumn days, and the sad sweet fall of the leaf, there was little to do, and I did it with ease and satisfaction.

I took the girls up to London, where they stayed with a grand-aunt of theirs—a wise and wonderful woman, who was always asking me questions about 'the colonies,' as she was pleased to lump them for greater convenience. 'Jack Overtrace had gone to Adelaide five years since. Did I know him? He was always a nice boy, couldn't be got to understand the value of money, and they do say he drank a little, but that's a secret confined to friends.'

My private conviction, after hearing these disjointed accounts, was that the young gentleman alluded to was probably shepherding 'somewhere at the back.' I thought this, but I said 'there were fine openings there for steady young men with the smallest possible capital. I had unfortunately never met the gentleman in question.'

We did not remain in the great city, even Babylon, for any extended period. We were all agreed upon that point. We duly did the picture-galleries, the parks, and whatever thousand-and-one sights London boasts, that must be seen by a stranger. But after a fortnight or three weeks a horror of great weariness settled

upon one and all. Despite the parks and theatres, galleries and museums, new books and new faces, we pined for the calm delights of the country, and rushed down to the old Hall as if we had been years absent, instead of weeks, from its shadowy slopes.

My uncle seemed hardly able to comprehend this excessive intolerance of town life. 'I don't wonder at the girls,' he would say, 'for they are country mice, and will remain so, I hope, all their lives. Gwen misses her schools, and Githa firmly believes that her old women will be dead if she stays a month away from them. But as to a youngster like Rolf here, I should have expected him to have found amusement in London sufficient to have kept him from preferring a dismal old moated grange like Boldrewood.'

'My dear uncle, I have always been of the mind of the Douglas, who would rather hear the lark sing than the mouse squeak. I don't think that I enjoy any the less the luxuries of a high civilisation. But after a term of town, which I enjoy with a curious intensity, another feeling sets in, much akin to that of the Bedouin in a walled city, the sea-rover on shore, the trapper at a border fort. To what particular section of our ancestry we owe this uncomfortable tendency I know not. But in our branch of the family it abides, neither to be tamed by toil nor sapped by enjoyment. My father has it strongly salient, or I suppose he would not have gone to Australia in the old days, when the voyage took nearly a year; not that it was calculated to prepossess people when they did get there.'

CHAPTER XVIII

'I SUPPOSE that feeling has subsided with Uncle Eric now?' asked Gwen. 'He must have had enough of work, and exploring, and blacks by this time.'

'Not a bit of it,' I returned. 'Only a few years ago he acquainted us with the fact that, from getting too prosperous, he was leading too easy a life, to which he attributed certain rheumatic pains, whereupon, a new settlement having been spoken of to the south, he started off with tents and drays, sheep and cattle, to travel a thousand miles through almost unknown country, where the blacks too had killed every man of the party that preceded him.'

'And what happened to the hardy Norseman?' asked Githa. 'Had he to return penitent, begging for forgiveness, and a flannel night-cap?'

'You don't know the governor, *belle cousine*, he doesn't turn back much. No! he got down without loss of man or beast, took up two fine runs, bought a score of town allotments, helped to found a great colony, bought a brig, and came back by water, cured of his aches and pains, and looking ten years younger than when he started.'

'It does run in the blood, I suppose,' mused my uncle. 'Eric was just the same as a boy—delighted in fighting poachers, and, indeed, in anything dangerous or difficult, so that it was not of the nature of regular, respectable work.'

'That's why Harold would go to India,' said Githa, with a sigh. 'I think the restless feeling you seem

proud of, Rolf, may be carried a little too far. He might just as well have stayed here and taken care of us.'

'And acted as bailiff and kept the farm books?' said my uncle, indignantly. 'No! let him go forth like his fathers before him; when he returns he will be a man whose deeds will have shed lustre upon the old house, not merely a small country squire.'

'You are all equally bad,' said Gwen, 'even papa, who ought to know better. I wonder whether Guy Wyndham will return when the regiment's ordered home. They must be nearly due for that blessed change now.'

'Why shouldn't Major Wyndham come home with his regiment?' said my uncle. 'We shall be all glad to see him again, after his deeds at Cawnpore; he will only have to throw the handkerchief among all you lasses. Ah, Rolf! I am afraid even an Australian would have a bad chance with a soldier, putting aside the wounds and glory that have fallen to Guy Wyndham's share—eh, Githa?'

I looked at Adelgitha for an instant, and saw by the burning blush and quivering eyelid that the subject was too near her heart for jesting. I had found out something of the cause which rendered my young cousin so serene and philosophical in her general demeanour, compared with most girls of her age. Guy Wyndham had sailed for India some years since, a penniless lieutenant, rich in the possession of a true and trusting heart, and with rather indefinite prospects as to promotion or matrimony. But the celebrated Major Wyndham of that gallant regiment which was in every one's mouth after Lucknow, was in a very different position from that of the unknown, half-despairing subaltern who had gone out to India praying for active service, as his only chance whereby my uncle's

obduracy might be softened. For the old Squire, however kind to his daughters, was averse to imprudent marriages. And it could not be denied that an infantry subaltern, with little more than his pay, ranked as a detrimental, even with the least worldly of parents and guardians. But, all honour to the fond hopes and unshaken faith of true womanhood, Adelgitha had seen the gallant leader in the untried soldier, and love had proved the seer and the prophet.

'I have been always conscious of my social deficiencies, uncle,' said I, willing to make a diversion for Githa's sake, 'but you do the Australian young ladies injustice if you think that I require to be taught my inferiority to a red-coat so late in life.'

'So there is actually no difference in the tastes of young ladies all over the world,' said Gwen, saucily; 'but I think, my dear and modest cousin, you'll find that a handsome Australian squatter (what a really graceful bow), with five thousand a year, may hold his own with our romantic sex against either arm of the service. So don't go and flatter Githa's prejudices unnecessarily.'

'How about Ireland?' said I; 'are these said prejudices obsolete or in full bloom there.'

'Go and see, and *ask* for yourself,' answered Gwendoline, with a shade of constraint in her manner; 'that's the best advice that ever was given where a woman is concerned. Yes, it's the dressing-bell,' and she ran out.

. . . . . .

'Pleasant it was when woods were green' at Boldrewood Chase. The girls were as cheerfully sweet, the Squire as carefully hospitable as from the first. But this sort of thing, obviously, could not go on for ever. The leaves were beginning to fade and fall. The nights were growing chill. The sad-voiced autumn

winds wailed mournfully over yet another dying summer. The war-notes of the Pytchley, the Duke's, the Quorn, and many another historic pack of fox-hounds, began to sound. And I, manfully yet reluctantly, packed my traps, reviewed my cords and tops, studied my Bradshaw, glanced at my horses, admonished my groom, and gave the route for Ireland. When I say horses, I may explain that I had bought another hunter, and had also quite accidentally possessed myself of a groom. Both acquirements were good of their kind.

The Squire and I had ridden over to watch the sale of a famous hunting stud, the owner of which had found, as he said, 'Old Time handicapping him, and decided to sell while he had the chance.' Few would have suspected the hale, fresh-visaged Lord Forester of any mental or physical weakness which might interfere with his sailing away at the tail of the hounds, as had been his custom for many a year. 'But I know best,' he said. 'When a man's turned middle age, it's a constant struggle against the down-hill process. My head isn't as good as it was, nor my back, nor my legs, nor my eyes. I'm not an Assheton Smith or a Tatton Sykes, so I shall gracefully retire while there is time, and yield the *pas* to younger men.'

Looking over the stud, I was principally attracted by a quiet-looking, plain, but powerful and well-bred bay.

'Do you see that horse, with the brown-faced youngster exercising him?' I said to my uncle; 'he looks something in my line, if the price is not too high. He can jump and gallop both, or I am mistaken. Let us look at his mouth. But, first, do you see the young fellow on him; he's the picture of a Sydney native, and how he got that brown face here, I don't know.'

'Well,' said the Squire, 'he is a smart, neat-looking fellow enough; rather slight, but particularly well built, and seems to know how to keep his tongue still—a faculty I hold greatly in admiration. So let us look at this probable bargain.'

We walked up and spoke to the groom, who was slowly riding him round the lawn. 'Which horse is this in the catalogue, and what is his name?'

'No. 39, namé Wanderer, age 8,' said the groom, with a listless expression upon his regular, well-cut features, the delicacy of which, though bronzed, seemed rather above his present condition. I put a sovereign into his hand, as I patted the horse's glossy neck, and said, 'Now, tell me all about him.' The apathetic look vanished, and instead of it appeared a pleasant, rather handsome face. He said—

'Wanderer, to my fancy, sir, is far and away the best horse in this stud.'

'But is he a really good hunter?'

'Well, I believe, sir, from what I've picked up, that he's very fast, a good stayer, plenty of pluck, and very quiet, if that's your idea of a good horse. And as to jumping, he's never been half tried yet, but everything he has been put to he can do, with pounds to spare.'

'Wouldn't make a bad stock horse,' said I suddenly, 'if the cattle were neglected and the country rangey.'

The groom looked at me for an instant with a wistful, eager air, as if he doubted the evidence of his senses—or as if he, a captive in a far land, had suddenly been accosted in his native tongue.

'Oh, Lord! sir,' he gasped out, 'you don't—no, you don't mean to say you come from Australia?'

'I fancy you're a Sydney man,' I made answer; 'I come from the same direction myself. Now, how does

it happen that I see you here? You didn't come overland with stock, I suppose?'

'It was this way, sir: I went up to Calcutta with horses; the wages were pretty good so far, but there was nothing to be done when you'd got there—black grooms at twopence a dozen, and not such bad fellows either.'

'How did you get to England then?' I asked.

'You see, sir, there was an officer going home, as they call it, with a couple of horses, that had been chargers; I seen one of them flarin' up on the street one day; he was rather above himself, as one might say; and I says to the 'syce, "Give him to me, old man, for a bit; I see the brand on him, W.R. off shoulder." Many a colt I had broken of the breed. So the cove come by as I was sittin' on him, pretty easy like, and him proppin' and terrifyin' the niggers; and says he, "You're a Waler, I suppose, and used to these horses."

'"I'm a Sydney chap," says I, "and I've always been about horses; I almost think I've seen this grey horse before—he's very like Emerald, that won the Melbourne Hunt Club steeplechase, carrying twelve stone eight, in 185–."

'"It is Emerald," says he, "and if you like to look after him and the other horse, I'm going to England next mail, and I'll take you."

'"All right, sir," says I; "I always wanted to see the world, and I can get back to Sydney, in charge of a short-horn bull, or a Clydesdale, or something, if I don't drop on a show."'

'And what do you think of England, now you are here?' I asked, partly for my uncle's information, who had been regarding my new acquaintance with much interest and curiosity.

'It's a fine country enough, no doubt, sir—rather

small and full stocked, I should say, in case there came a bad season. Blest if I didn't stare when I came ashore first, and seen the men's jolly fresh faces. "Oh, Lord!" thinks I, "here's a country chock full of 'new chums.'" It did seem so queer like. However, I got over the strangeness pretty soon. I held my tongue, like most grooms, and was always took for an Englishman who had "gone foreign."'

'And what became of your master and Emerald?'

'Well, sir, I think the Major made the pace a trifle too good. Anyhow, the horses went to Tattersall's one fine day, and I was paid off. I got a helper's place here, and now we're going to be sold.'

'Then I'll buy you,' said I; 'I'll bid anything reasonable for Wanderer, and you can come and look after him and an English buck-jumper I've got—eh, uncle?—what do you say?'

'I'd sooner come for my rations, sir, than for good wages anywhere else. It's a bargain.'

'And what was Emerald like?' I asked.

'Emerald, sir,' said the Australian, raising his head, and looking far afield with his keen eyes, as if he were watching the sun rise over a gray waste of solemn plain, in the fair, fresh summer dawn—'Emerald was the loveliest 'oss as ever stood upon legs. His dam was a Satellite mare, half Arab, and his sire Bay Camerton. He took a deal of beating for three miles, over the flat—and jump! I seen him jump a lane with a new four-foot-nine three-rail fence on each side. Blest if I didn't think he was going to fly the two fences and the half chain road, in his stride. And how he came at it at three-quarter speed, and landed so close to the second fence, that Mr. Gordon had to pull him off a bit, and put him at it sideways; then he just rose off his hind legs and bucked over, as if it were a sheep hurdle.'

'The bidding is just going to begin,' said I, afraid that my friend's Australian reminiscences were overpowering him. 'What's your name, by the way?'

'Jim Whitby, sir.'

'The same that rode Saracen in his great race with the Red Fisherman?' I asked.

'The same,' said he, raising his head proudly, 'and a very pretty race it was. Did you see it, sir?'

'I did, very close thing—your riding will suit me very well, if all else goes right.'

The sale commenced. In spite of Wanderer's plain and unambitious appearance, it had leaked out that he was a good thing. Consequently I was opposed; but when he fell to my bid of £280, I did not feel that the money was badly invested.

We drove home tolerably well pleased with our day's work, my uncle having secured a shooting pony of exceptional talent, according to local rumour.

'I think you have got a good horse, Rolf,' said the old gentleman, 'though he went a shade higher than I expected. I like the look of your countryman, the groom; he is a remarkably neat, well-built fellow, and his manner is that of a shrewd, sensible man, who might be depended upon in a difficulty.'

'If he be a good specimen of his class,' I answered, 'he is all that, and has, perhaps, other unsuspected accomplishments? Our servants in Australia have the advantage of larger experience than men in the same grade in the mother country; and if they possess energy and intelligence, generally raise themselves in life. I shouldn't wonder if Master Jim turned out a good sort of henchman as well as stud groom.'

'I suppose he is really a good man among horses.'

'As far as mere riding goes, he has not many superiors as "an all round man," as he would himself

say. I saw him finish, most artistically, when a mere lad, one of the closest and fastest races ever run in New South Wales—he may be considered to be a born rough-rider. He has ridden steeplechases; and if he had not been above the average, he would not have found a place at Wandagong stable—notoriously one of the strictest in Australia.'

'Well, that sounds like a good article. He'll be able to ride Pirate at exercise, and that will be a lessening of your cares.'

'Happy thought, sir! one does not feel in the humour every day to do battle with a homicide in high condition. I shall hand over to him that violent Turk, and his daily walks abroad will cost me less anxiety.'

Next morning, when Jim arrived with the horses, there was great excitement at the Chase. The Squire had told the girls that I had bought a horse and picked up an Australian groom, who had rambled hither by way of India; also, that of all the shooting ponies which he had *ever* seen or heard of, the one he had purchased for the ridiculously low price of sixty guineas was the most perfect.

'Papa always picks up a wonderful shooting pony,' said Gwendoline laughingly; 'but occasionally they don't turn out so admirably. Do you remember, Githa, that lovely broad-backed chestnut? He was like a sofa on four legs. Well, the first time papa shot over him he was terrified out of his wits, charged the party, knocked down a keeper and galloped off with the lunch, jumped into the stable through a window, scraping as much skin off in the process as retarded the sale, till poor papa was tired of the sight of him.'

'Didn't see him tried, then?' said I.

'Of course I did,' growled the old gentleman; 'but it was the old story: they delivered to me a chestnut

pony so like the one I had seen and proved that I could not have sworn to the difference. There was no getting at the scoundrels; they went off rejoicing—elaborating a scheme doubtless for selling glandered carriage horses to the next country gentleman who was fool enough to treat with utterly unknown dealers.'

'These things are very cleverly arranged,' said I; 'but what a recurring crop of fools there must be for the knaves to browse on.'

'So it would appear, Rolf,' answered my uncle rather testily, as both girls began to laugh. 'But have you no clever people in the same line in Australia?'

'A few doubtless,' I confessed; 'but our horse-thieves, as the Yankees call them, are more simple and direct in their dealings, as befits a new land. They steal the horses right out and bear them into the wilderness, or else they sell a blind or halt quadruped for a sound one. But the careful composition of the swindle, the casting of the parts to get up the characters, and the false address, belong solely to England and the English. Your equine diseases also are more deceptive.'

'How do you make that out?' asked the old gentleman.

'Well, perhaps it arises from the natural condition which in early life our horses are able to enjoy. They rove in their youth over plain, forest, and rocky hill-side; they drink of the clear stream, and snuff the free desert breeze, or the hot blast which sweeps seaward from the torrid waste of the interior. So that injured legs and lameness being the ailments most in vogue, the buyer has no need for the preternatural caution and suspicion absolutely essential and necessary to that much-enduring individual here. Who would dream of taking a guarantee in Australia against "seedy toe"?'

'Did you ever hear of it there?'

'Never, on my honour as a horse-owner. I met Grantly one day in Piccadilly though, who was seeking Thornton, a London Australian who had sold him a pair of carriage horses with "seedy toe." I laughed in his face.

'"Well, you know," said Grantly, "it's a serious matter. I gave that fellow Thornton a longish price; and what is a man to do with a pair of brutes that kick their shoes off as fast as they put them on?"

'"Very sad indeed," said I. "Why don't you send out an order to Buchan Thompson to send you home a pair of five-year-old Tarragons from Sydney? They wouldn't have 'seedy toe,' you might safely bet."

'"It would be safer in the end," assented he, ruefully.

'I departed, much reflecting on one of these two immensely rich men being so unnecessarily sharp as to sell his friend a pair of doubtful horses, and the other being so lachrymose about the possible loss of such a trifle to him as a couple of hundred pounds.'

'You're very magnificent in your ideas, Rolf, my boy; but it's an unpleasant sensation to be the purchaser of an unsound horse; it's not the money so much, but the reflection upon your judgment that galls so.'

'Papa speaks from experience,' said Gwen playfully; 'he has been more than once victimised. He once bought a hunter from a clergyman which exactly answered the description of "Marathon" in *Market Harborough*, being "a slow horse, a sulky horse, and by no means safe at his fences." Oh, it was a great shame. Papa was nearly turning dissenter!'

'Don't believe her, Rolf; I have quite as good luck in horse-dealing as my neighbours, but the best judge is occasionally deceived. I hope Harold will be back

from India before the hunting season is well on. I shall leave the stud to him, and you two youngsters can have a little riding together.'

'Harold's a lighter weight than Rolf,' said Githa, lighting up at the mention of India, 'and always went like a bird, they say; but I suspect Rolf's bush training will give him the advantage.'

'We shall see—we shall see. Harold is not particularly fond of being "cut out," even by a friend. Do you remember a certain Major having the best of it, and how Harold had to be pacified and comforted?'

'I hope they will have more sense than to ride jealous,' said my uncle. 'But now I think of it, the Illingford steeplechase comes off towards the end of the season, and by that time Rolf will have come back from Ireland, let us hope, and he can enter Pirate or Wanderer, or the wonderful Galway hunter that he is sure to bring back with him.'

'What a splendid idea!' cried out Gwen; 'I should like to see the Australian division well represented.'

'Perhaps I might be lucky enough to fall across the wonderful Emerald that Jim talks of so glowingly,' said I. 'In that case I really don't mind promising to waste and ride one more race for the honour of Australia.'

'We must turn out the drag and four-in-hand and go over in style; it will be like old times,' said the Squire jovially; 'and have a few visitors to fill the old house, girls. But when do you go to Ireland, Rolf, and must you go?'

'I must go,' said I, 'and if I am to start at all I must be off next Monday. Jim says the horses are in very fair trim, and will train on by the time they're wanted for work. So I must give him the route. I shall not be away three months.'

'Perhaps you won't be let ride when you come back,' pouted Gwen mischievously; 'some people are very exacting.'

'I have hitherto enjoyed a fair share of freedom,' I answered, 'and have had my own way so long that I shall be inclined to keep up the habit. And now, as Githa hasn't said anything for the last twenty minutes, I think it must be bedtime. *Andiamo!*'

. . . . . .

Another start. Really it was almost as bad as leaving the governor and one's home in Australia. One would have thought I was going to slay Theodore or discover Livingstone; that Galway and the Gaboon were in the same latitude, or that yellow fever was raging on the banks of the Shannon. My uncle wrung my hand with a kindly grip which caused a decided tingling in the extremities thereof; and Gwen, after bestowing a cousinly kiss, fled back abruptly from the breakfast-table; while Githa, serene as usual to outward seeming, held a suspicious look about her soft, dreamy eyes. Jim Whitby had, since a very early hour, had the Pirate and Wanderer hooded, sheeted, and muzzled, ready for speedy deposit in any train, for any part of the United Kingdom. He was despatched to the station in good time, so as to allow for the Pirate's natural repugnance to land carriage, and I followed in the mail-phaeton with the Squire, who, for once, was bordering on the sentimental. 'Good-bye, and God bless you, Rolf, my lad,' said he, as we parted; 'I never thought to care for any youngster again after Harold left us. I doubt, we'll never have such a pleasant autumn again together. Come back in time to see Harold, when he's back from India, and win the Illingford steeplechase.'

The railway signal sounded. The jolly, stalwart

Squire departed with a kindly smile on his visage, and I sped away steam-borne, as on a domesticated dragon, across the green levels of Hampshire, past London, vast smoke-enfolded human hive, through the glorious old town of Chester, past Conway Castle, until we finally swept out on Holyhead pier, and into the arms, so to speak, of the *Connaught*, one of the fastest steamers afloat.

CHAPTER XIX

WE stayed the first night at Chester, that nice old city, and found the 'Queen' a very decent habitation. Jim was graciously pleased to express his honest admiration of Chester.

'It does a feller's heart good to look at a place like this, sir, that he can feel the age of, if he was fool enough to have any doubt about its having been a grand place these many a hundred years ago. Now, our country is so brand new, everything looks as if it was built the week afore last. Not but what it's a good country all the same.'

Next day we were spinning along the pleasant green land, watching the broad-backed sheep and solid shorthorns that depasture in such peace and plenty therein.

'Good country this, Jim,' said I, at the first station; 'what grass and clover, and how thick and sweet the sward looks!'

'No mistake about that, sir,' answered Jim; 'a run like this would be worth something, but it's cut up into tremendous small paddocks with these hedges. Seems

to me they must waste a lot of feed, unless they're wanted for shelter.'

'In the winter there is some need of that,' I said; 'but it is admitted that the fields in England, generally, are too small for high farming.'

We passed 'the sands of Dee,' where I thought of 'the cruel hungry foam, the cruel crawling foam,' as 'Mary went to call the cattle home,' and of 'her grave beside the sea.'

We saw the mouldering, haughty ruin of Conway Castle, and the hills and valley of North Wales. We had stopped for a short time, and I went to inspect the horses, which I had found very snug and comfortable.

'Rangey country this, sir,' remarked Jim. 'Daresay, if we had time to look, we should find the cattle and horses smaller, and even the men and women a trifle different from England. I've always noticed that the country makes more difference in time than the stock you put into it. No matter what you begin with, if the country's thick and broken, the cattle get small and wild, the sheep and the horses lose quality, and the men, and some of the women, mostly turn out gullyrakers and bushrangers, and everything that's bad. Curious—it never happens on open forest or plains. No! it's the rangey country does it with 'em, and that's all about it.'

'Well, Jim, you know our country was called New South Wales because it was supposed to resemble this principality in its up-and-down tendency. But what do you mean about the women turning into gully-rakers in mountain country in Australia?'

'My word, sir,' he answered, 'and quite true too. Haven't you heard tell of those Brookby girls up in the mountains, near the Devil's Punchbowl?'

'No; why, what about them?'

'Why, they lived in an awful cold, lonely place, very high up; but there was splendid feed, and runnin' creeks all the driest summer. Lots of cattle made their way there every drought. Well, of course, many a one went into the "round yard," and every calf was "nobbled" as soon as he could grass. I was out there one day looking for horses, and was just waterin' my horse in a creek, when a bullock—he wasn't bad meat—came tearin' down the leading range, and two fellers after him, goin' like smoke. They pulled up when they seen me. "Hulloa, boys," said I, "does the BF brand belong to you? I always thought it was old Judge Field's."

'They looked at me for a while, and burst out laughing. "Why, you don't mean to say," says I—but they turned down the crick, and went off as hard as their horses could lay their legs to the ground, jumping the boulders, and making the scrub crack again, leaving me with my mouth open.'

'Why, was there anything so strange in two fellows running across bullock, near the Punchbowl?'

'Fellers, sir! that was what knocked me. They was both girls!'

'And were they riding in side-saddles?' I asked, with natural curiosity.

'Not a bit of it—just like you and me—only they had their dresses tucked up and twisted round their ankles. Mighty good-lookin' they was too. I heard after they were two of the Brookby girls.'

'It's not every man that would like to ride in that country, either,' I continued, 'as I recollect it.'

'You may say that, sir,' said Jim; 'where these two young scamps came rattlin' down was like the side of a house—scrub and rocks, and holes all through, and they going three-quarter speed.'

'No brothers?'

'Only one, and he has a good deal to do at home, so that the girls, from beginning to run up the horses, and helping to brand, have become regular cattle-stealers. He's a rough chap, or they might have come to better things.'

. . . . . .

The sea was not particularly smooth. We crossed in the *Connaught*, one of the four new steamers, and though she was fast, and a good sea-boat, the chopping sea was the most severe trial of stability that I had undergone since we passed the Leeuwin. However, the voyage was short. We left Holyhead at four o'clock in the afternoon, and it was not more than dark when we made Queenstown. We were soon housed for the night at the very good hotel at the end of the pier. In spite of the darkness we managed to find our way, and I did not fare so badly as an Englishman who landed about the same time. He was picked up by a carman devoid of proper principle, who galloped off into the night, drove him about unknown streets for half an hour, and then dashed up to the hotel door.

'How much to pay?' asked the stranger.

'Taking the distance, sure I couldn't charge your honour less nor five shillings.'

It was paid. Looking from his breakfast-room next morning the tourist thus demanded of his waiter, 'What's that about a hundred yards off towards the sea?'

'Sure it's the jetty, where your honour landed last night.'

Sensation—succeeded by strong language.

I ran up to Dublin and concluded to stay a few days in that romantic city. It was filled with romance for me. How many historical characters

had made it their home, and the scene of their deathless exploits!

There Frank Webber had gathered the crowd around the pavement in imaginary converse with the subterranean victim of the hour. I fancied I could catch the rich tones of 'Och! the crather, he's fainted.' Here dwelt Fred Power, Sir Harry Boyle, O'Grady, Charles O'Malley, Corny Delany, Harry Lorrequer, Paul Rooney—crowds of racy immortals!

Here was Dame Street, down which came clanking the troop of cavalry, into which Dodd and Dempsey, upon Marius, incontinently charged. Could this be Dawson Street, as well known as George and Pitt Streets? Was I actually—in the flesh—strolling down Sackville Street, and had not as yet encountered Bagenal Daly and the Knight of Gwynne arm in arm, the Lord Lieutenant bowing to Mrs. Paul Rooney, or Count Considine bearing a cartel with homicidal humility of manner to Mr. Bodkin, of Bodkin Bog? Unrivalled Lever! His works, what storehouses of wit, humour, chivalry, fun, pathos, and adventure—love, war, dancing, duelling, and devilment! How many an hour of pleasurable excitement have I not owed to thy joyous pages! Well—here I was, in the enchanted land, and I set myself to discover any stray griffins and phœnixes for myself. I thought I knew the *carte du pays* by heart, and was well qualified to do travels and sketches on my own account.

I had introductions in the neighbourhood of Dublin, on presenting which, I received that cordial recognition which welcomes the accredited stranger nowhere in the same degree as in Ireland. There is expressed a certain gratitude to you for having come—to the introductory friend for having sent you. Acknowledging this most thoroughly, I was puzzled to account for the sharply

marked differences which smote upon every sense as soon as one's foot touched the soil—between England and Ireland.

In what it consisted I was for a time unable to state to myself, though I felt it at every step I took.

The gentry themselves, in their houses, servants, and appointments, were almost identical with the corresponding members of the social system in England.

But the moment you came out of the lodge gates the scene changed. Then were apparent the evils of an over-populated country, and they were many. Rags, idleness, want, mendicity, bad farming, high rents, subdivision of farms already too small, blind unreasoning attachment to the soil, evictions, murders—this was the long catalogue of Irish woes, and it was hard to gainsay it.

I cannot conscientiously state that I was charmed with Dublin as a city. Expatriated Irishmen, with the sympathetic imaginativeness which belongs to the race, time and distance having softened the outlines of memory, generally depict Dublin as a city of pure delights, combining the sparkle of Paris with the intellectual pre-eminence of Edinburgh, and the architectural magnificence of St. Petersburg.

There are plenty of nice people in Dublin, which remark applies in the widest sense to the whole of Ireland, but as a city, Dublin has no pretensions to rank above ordinary provincial towns.

Sackville Street is certainly broad and straight; not much more can be said by way of a compliment. At the time of my visit I wondered at the mud, the depth of which the municipal authorities seemed to have no more idea of lessening than the lacustrine communities could have had of abrogating piles. The rain being continuous, mud was the dispensation of

Providence; and no more exception could be taken to one than to the other.

Breadth and nobility of proportion as to some of the streets suggested a liberal and prosperous epoch. But the effect was destroyed by the aspect of the lanes or alleys which ran into the more important thoroughfares. In these poverty and squalid misery reigned supreme. Dirty clothes on long poles fluttered from the windows, while the inhabitants, wretched, ragged, shoeless, demonstrated a curiously contented state of hopeless poverty such as I had hitherto neither seen nor dreamed of.

Perhaps the same may be said of the back streets of all large cities—Paris, London, Edinburgh, Glasgow. In these human hives the same type of moneyless, clotheless, shameless, apparently soulless humanity moves, genders and grows in mere animal possession of life! Well would it be for society if such could be deported without reference to social rights, which by their mode of life they have forfeited. In the new lands, where they could be placed in possession of their lost birthright, fresh air, free soil, and God's open sky, a real life of comparative dignity and labour might be possible. In the squalid lairs, where they lie huddled like starved animals, what can happen but the lowest degeneration, physical and moral? Here and in Edinburgh I witnessed for the first time the effects of that unnatural economy of space which denies even a back-yard to the very poor. Their patched and wretched clothing was only capable of being dried by suspension from the poles which I saw protruded from the windows of each storey.

There is great natural beauty about the environs of Dublin; but I was not fortunate enough to be impressed with any admiration of the city on the whole —notwithstanding the laudations of all the patri-

otic Irishmen whom I had met abroad. There was a want of order, of symmetrical arrangement, and systematic repair common to the streets, the public buildings, and the parks. The Phœnix Park itself had more the air of a paddock with the fences in bad repair, than of the marvel of velvet lawn and trim greenery which either in England or France would have been the case.

Then, whatever grandeur might have been extracted from the appearance of the streets—the public buildings and rows of substantial houses—was lost immediately you invaded the suburbs. I thought of Thackeray's assertion that potatoes commenced immediately above No. 25 Eccles Street. So they do. You then entered upon the average agricultural Ireland—bare, wet, treeless, and over-populated to a degree which I never saw paralleled elsewhere. There is no finer grazing country in the world, but whether from the effects of unlimited 'free selection,' social and agrarian, the whole island resembles a collection of farms as little as a rabbit warren resembles a market garden.

One thing which is particularly noticeable in the neighbourhood of Dublin is the extraordinary number of well-grown, reasonably dressed and educated, but unoccupied young men. They were in regiments and battalions. This state of things may be accounted for by the facts and characteristics which make the Irish peasant the most laggard emigrant in Britain. Living is cheap, and there is some magical property in the air which renders all who breathe it for a generation the most passionately attached of all mankind to their homes and kindred—the most sanguine about their prospects in their overcrowded island. A place under Government—a small secretaryship—a pleasant country life with an elder brother, or cousin, or friend among

the landed gentry, is looked upon as a prize and provision for life. As long as these are not utterly unattainable, Mr. Darcy or Mr. O'Sullivan will by no prospect of adventure or independence be prevailed upon to leave his native land. When he does cross the Rubicon, however, he is capable of Cæsarism and conquest.

I paid a round of pleasant visits in Dublin and the vicinity, and explored some of the acknowledged bits of scenery, which I enjoyed thoroughly—these philosophical reflections notwithstanding. Before I depart from Dublin, let me place upon record my intense and respectful appreciation of the extraordinarily high average of good looks possessed by the female portion of the population. Never before had I seen such a number of pretty girls. I used to watch them trooping down Sackville and Dawson Streets in the murky autumn evenings, irradiating the sombre sky and the desperately muddy pavements with their magenta petticoats. What brilliant complexions, what flashing eyes! Whether all this beauty was due to the weeping skies, to the admixture of Celtic blood, as favourable to intelligence and vitality, or to the simple and natural mode of life which obtains in the sister isle, I know not; but the fact was there. Every other girl that one saw in the street seemed handsome in face, form, or expression. My blessing upon them. 'A minstrel's benison is said!'

Despairing of a change of weather, and thinking I might as well be wet through in one place as another, I cleared out for Westmeath, where dwelt an elder brother of an Australian friend whom I had sworn for his sake, poor fellow, to visit.

We reached the terminus in all safety, where the carriage of Mr. Ulick O'More awaited me, as did also a well-appointed groom, who looked after Jim and the

horses, and in due time deposited them in the spacious stables and affiliated apartments of Morestown.

The chill autumnal evening was deepening into night as we entered through the heavy scutcheon-surmounted iron gates, the noble avenue that led to the ancient pile where so many a squire of the O'Mores had feasted and fought, and drank and diced, and lived and loved as became one of the 'rale ould stock.'

A handsome, fresh-coloured, middle-aged personage met me as I stepped out, and with a manner in which the air of a man of the world blended harmoniously with the frank courtesy of his country, bade me welcome to Morestown.

'You'll find us a little different from England, Mr. Boldrewood,' he said; 'but we must try and show you something that will make the time pass.'

As I entered the dining-room after a leisurely toilette, and the cheering influence of a luxurious turf fire which glowed in my bedroom, I sympathised with the sadness which occasionally had seized upon Phil O'More when he feared he should never see the old house again. There was something in the banqueting-room, hung round with spoils of the chase, and the immense horns and frontal of the fossil Irish elk—something in the frank faces of divers relatives and friends of the family invited to do honour to a guest, that brought forcibly home to me the 'deep unutterable woe which none but exiles feel,' and which in our workaday land is often too lightly regarded, in the case of the unsuccessful cadet of an old family.

I had no time to dwell upon this rather melancholy aspect of colonisation, as, after the necessary introductions, my host plunged into a series of cheerful queries about English politics, farming operations, Australian prospects, shorthorns, coursing and shooting — the

answers to and comments upon which, by the assembled guests, rapidly produced that degree of good fellowship which so notoriously follows the popping of the first champagne cork at a picnic or a wedding breakfast.

CHAPTER XX

'AND how long will it take Phil to make his fortune in that fine country of yours?' asked my host; 'he has been out there these seven years, and if he hadn't thought five would have seen him back in Westmeath, with a good bank account, divil a foot of him would ever have left Morestown.'

'Your brother is doing fairly well,' I said, 'though he lives in rather a lonely place; but making a fortune is not such a rapid process in Australia as might be thought. We don't think seven years a long time to spend in laying the foundations. Many a man loses it after all, and has to hark back and begin again.'

'D'ye tell me so?' said a shrewd-looking, slight man, with well-trimmed whiskers, and a remarkably bright eye; 'and may I ask ye, Mr. Boldrewood, if that's the case, that a couple of thousands, and, maybe, ten years of the best of a man's life, are no warrant for getting rich in Botany Bay—why a man should lave old Ireland, where the men and the women, and the sport and the claret, are all allowed to be good, and go to foreign parts, among kangaroos and naygurs, and break his heart, all for nothing at all?'

Here the speaker finished his glass of claret with lingering fondness, and looked round the company, as who should say with Godfrey O'Malley, 'Here I

am, boys, ready to die for you, but never to desert you.'

'Bedad,' said another of the party, 'it's the fine settler that Anty would make. Sure they've had a great loss of him in the colonies.'

'I don't know about that,' interposed our host, 'but we should have had a great loss of him here. Who should we have to tie our flies for us, and who would know which horse was to go out and which to stay at home, if Antony Daly wasn't to the fore? I might go if I liked; and upon my credit, since that cattle plague came in, I've had thoughts of emigration. But the county could no more get on without *him* than Tuam without the Archbishop, therefore Providence put it into Phil's head to go, and into Antony's to stay at home.'

'I have no doubt whatever,' said I, 'that Mr. Antony was quite right to stay in so pleasant a county, where he was so thoroughly appreciated, but if stock rise you'll have my friend Phil back able to buy an estate of his own.'

'We were breaking our hearts when Phil went away,' said O'More; 'but maybe it was the best thing in the long run for him. But I'll go bail he often thinks of the first hare we killed together on the Bunsha.'

'I never knew a man who loved his native land more deeply than Philip O'More,' said I, 'or longed more passionately to return. Many a time have I seen the tears come into his eyes as he spoke of the old home—of his father—his brother—the friends of his youth. But he will either be a man or a mouse within the next five years; then you will see him here, or else he will have started for some far-off new settlement to seek his fortune anew.'

'Then we'll drink his health, wherever he may be,' said our host. 'Murtagh, bring in another magnum of

claret, and we'll have a bumper, boys! Here's to his health and to that of Mr. Boldrewood, who stood to Phil in a strange land. May he never want a friend in the day of need!'

These little ceremonies being performed with cheerfulness—even enthusiasm—we adjourned to the billiard room, where Mr. Daly, finding I played, was rather anxious to test my strength. I had always been sufficiently fond of billiards, or indeed of all games of mingled skill and chance. But when we played a hundred up, and Antony ran away from me at first to be caught and passed about the last thirty points, the amusement discernible upon the faces of the company was in the inverse ratio to the annoyance visible on the features of Mr. Daly.

As we smoked our final cigar, O'More proposed a ride round a portion of the estate next morning to see the country and have a little coursing. Nothing could be more suitable. I wished to look at some of the grazing lands, said to be unequalled by the richest county in Britain, and a slight infusion of coursing I felt would be pleasant enough among the large fields into which I knew the county was subdivided. The greater part of the estate was devoted to grazing—not but that once it had all been under tillage. But O'More's father, disliking the process of extracting his rents from an insolvent peasantry, had resolved upon clearing out the tenants, and in favour of store-cattle—a system to which his son had adhered. Of course, the elder O'More had difficulties, but being a man of iron will he had overcome them. Partly by compensation, and by the aid of emigration, he had managed to clear his estate of the amiable, improvident, but occasionally homicidal payers of peppercorn rents. They were gone. He was there finding the placing of

well-bred shorthorns upon his paternal acres—sending them when fat to Liverpool—simple and satisfactory as compared with the difficulties of rent, or the agonies of eviction.

After a leisurely breakfast, we had fared forth. The morning was fresh and dewy, and the thick, damp greensward glistened as we rode through the large enclosures, separated by tremendous 'oxers'—deep and broad ditches, with banks as large as mud-cabins, and then a moat on the other side. Feeding peacefully were cattle of various grades of condition and fitness for market. They were principally shorthorn crosses. I never saw finer grass anywhere, though I had seen land in Australia—the *crême de la crême* of course—of a rich district which nearly equalled it. I was shown the celebrated 'Bunsha,' a field of one hundred and twenty acres, evidently regarded as an immense enclosure. It was a fine piece of land doubtless; its carrying capacity was stated to be 'a bullock to the acre.' I saw one lot of cattle, just fattened and ready for market. They were good, but nothing very wonderful.

In another part of the estate, where more timber had been spared, my host pointed out a small herd of West Highlanders, of which he was evidently proud. Blacks and duns, shaggy and wide-horned, fierce-looking for the most part, they would have been looked upon with small favour by Mr. Benson Beanstalk, if he had fallen across them in Saltbushland; while the attitude of the aggressive patriarch of the herd, as he gave a short bellow and advanced menacingly, would have caused him to faint, or to call aloud for his rifle. Black is a colour which the Australian stock-owner rarely takes kindly to as an external covering for choice imported types. Our prejudices in that matter are strong and inflexible. Nevertheless, Highlanders

are paying stock. They fatten well, are hardy and easy to keep, while the quality of their meat is so unquestionably superior to that of the larger breeds—shorthorns and others—that it fetches twopence and threepence per pound more in the English markets.

I could fancy Hamish Bean and Fachan M'Ian walking briskly in the cold nights after just such a drove towards the south; but I fear me, if once they had been let loose on a run, with a belt of mallee handy, all the stock-riders on the Lachlan would not have sufficed to muster them, after a generation or two.

We reached the boundary of Morestown on one side, and saw a fine but rather modern country house. 'Who lives there?' said I.

'Well, a young fellow has just come into it, and a fine property it is,' said O'More.

'What sort of a neighbour is he?' I asked, thinking that I had got into a land where neighbours commenced to have definite value.

'Hasn't a heart as big as a fly,' returned Antony Daly decisively. 'He's a poor naygur of a fellow, who neither hunts, nor courses, nor drinks, nor does anything a man ought to do. I tried to get him to join our coursing club once, but the divil a bit of him would do anything like a Christian.'

'Talking of coursing,' said O'More suddenly; 'let us see if we can't beat a hare out of her form hereabouts. Many a one I've killed no great distance away.'

Two of the half-grown lads that infested O'More's stableyard had followed us out, each with a brace of greyhounds in slips. We were not long in finding a hare, and as puss dashed like a catapult from a tuft of grass, in the centre of a great green field, a couple of puppies were slipped, and at it they went. A most exciting race ensued. I rattled along upon a cob of

O'More's, not caring to take out a hunter, and puss had a set of teeth and a pair of cruel eyes very close to her scut, when an iron gate stopped the way. Under this popped artful puss. The leading puppy nearly killed himself against it, while the other one lost so much ground that the chase was, so far as he was concerned, practically concluded.

We were more fortunate with our second hare. The dogs were slipped easily, and the ground being favourable, puss was turned twice by Banshee, finally picked up and killed cleverly by Fingal, a splendid red dog, who added to extraordinary pace sufficient size and power to have made him formidable in a kangaroo district.

'What d'ye think of that?' shouted Antony Daly, who had followed every motion of hare and dogs with the loving eagerness of a thorough sportsman. 'Have ye any dogs like that in Australia? Divil a better pup of this year's entry than Fingal in Ireland.'

'We have pretty fair greyhounds in Australia,' said I, 'though, from the need of size and courage, we have bred them larger than yours, and, perhaps, a trifle coarser. However, I am not so sure that I could not find you a dog here and there who would give an account of a hare, if he had a good start in the middle of the "Bunsha."'

'Well, you're right, Antony, about Fingal,' said O'More, 'with one exception. I should have thought him the finest puppy of the season, if I hadn't seen one of Lord Lurgan's the other day, that made him look like a sheep-dog.'

'There's nothing on Irish soil that can take the beauty out of Fingal,' retorted Antony hotly,—'like that—what's his name?'

'There is,' answered O'More carelessly; 'you would

never look at our kennel again if you saw this wonderful youngster.'

'And his name?' gasped Antony; 'don't be terrifying a fellow like that. Have I ever seen him?'

'I'm not sure of that,' said O'More calmly, 'though it's not so far to the Lurgan kennels. His name is Master M'Grath.'

. . . . . .

'Do you ever have any pleuro among your cattle?' said I; 'I heard something about it in England.'

'Well, we have now and then,' said O'More; 'but the very moment we suspect the least taint, we ship them off for Liverpool.'

'Sound business principles,' said I, 'doubtless; but is there no inspector, and isn't it rather rough on the consumers?'

'The inspectors don't smell a rat unless he's specially pointed out; and after all it's feeding the poor. The beef goes a trifle lower; but I never heard any one returning and denouncing the practice.'

'Klephteis poté Parga,' said I. 'We don't monopolise all the smartness connected with stock-farming in Australia.'

'Well, maybe not; isn't the rain a trifle heavier than it was an hour ago?'

'I don't know; one ceases to speculate about rain in Britain. It has rained all the time I have been in Ireland, and more than half of that in England; how the deuce the corn ever ripens, I can't tell.'

'This is a very wet year, you must know.'

'I see that; I do indeed.'

'But you must not think,' said he, 'that such seasons occur annually. We have summers here now and then which would make you think you were back in Australia.'

'Oh, I daresay; as if you really could get up a little pure, unadulterated heat! Let us go in and see the peasant of the period. I see you are going to get off.'

'Yes; he's a fellow of mine that got hurt falling off a stack; his wife I don't like much. Whether or no, his lot is hard, and I should like to help him.'

We dismounted, and walked into the low doorway of the thatched, mud-walled cabin. The sick man sat by a turf fire, which smouldered with a certain latent heat and warmth, and for the greater convenience of replenishing the which, a regular stack of turf had been carried in and built up just in front of the fireplace, filling up the greater part of the one room, at the other end of which was the bed. This constituted the parlour, dining-room, and sleeping-apartment of the whole family—a term which included three or four children, a few fowls, and the inevitable, indispensable pig. The earthen floor, which was extremely damp, not to say dirty, was about two feet below the level of the roadway, receiving therefore a certain amount of drainage. In front of the door was the accustomed dunghill, the receptacle of all the débris of the establishment, and from which filtered the moisture which eventually found its way into the floor of the dwelling. The day was dark, the rain was constant and drizzling. There was little furniture; neither neatness, cleanliness, nor comfort in the lowly and crowded dwelling. I have rarely seen a more depressing sight.

O'More, I could see, in spite of his general bonhomie, was irritated with the general appearance of matters, as well as at the unfavourable impression made upon the mind of a stranger. So, after inquiries after the sick man's health, he said—

'Why the deuce don't you take a stick, Barney, and leather that lazy divil of a wife of yours round the

place for an hour? Why, the cabin is like a pigsty, and not an English one either!'

Barney smiled slily, as if these spirited suggestions were more difficult to carry out than to originate. Meanwhile, Biddy went on paddling about the mud with her bare feet, with a satisfied expression upon her healthy, fresh face, as if she was the tidiest person and the most conscientious about corners that ever handled a broom.

'I wonder if that man will recover,' said I; 'the surroundings are enough to kill him.'

'He'd have been killed long ago if there was danger in dirt,' said O'More bitterly. 'The lazy, shiftless divils hate change, and distrust cleanliness as a kind of precursor of high rents and Saxon prejudices in favour of punctual payment, tending to eviction. They cling to the rotten thatch upon their hovels with as much tenacity as if it were a talisman, and have no more notion of improving their condition in life by any other method than hoarding money in an old stocking than a beaver has of a tight rope.'

'But don't you find them attached and warm-hearted, especially to a man like you, whose ancestors have probably ruled over the forefathers of every tenant and poor neighbour you have to-day?'

'I don't know that; I am the landlord, and apparently have a certain degree of influence, and receive lip service, and so on. But I doubt there being any solid tie between us, though I have done all for my retainers that I could.'

'Why don't you go in for the county?' said I, with sudden inspiration. 'That would give you more occupation, and perhaps unite shades of opinion.'

'Impossible,' said he; 'I have never been asked, and a man in my position has only to make the attempt to

discover the insignificant political position which he really occupies.'

'Why, surely you could carry the county any day you liked,' I exclaimed; 'your name must have been a household word for centuries about here.'

'Even so,' he answered, 'there has been an O'More in the lands we are riding over from a period antecedent to authentic history. We were dispossessed, it is true, by Old Noll, but my ancestor was a handsome man, and he married the only daughter of the Ironside who had received a gift of the old place. So he restored the blood, slightly mixed, and the old name.'

'That is how you came to be Protestant, I suppose, in spite of your prefix.'

'Just so; and how we came to make a little money, I suppose, which no O'More had ever demeaned himself by doing before that alliance. Fairfax O'More at his majority declared himself of the reformed religion, built a conventicle on the estate, insisted upon rent, imported stock and servants from England, where he had been educated, and altogether pursued a career which would have ended in unpopularity and slugs, had it occurred in this enlightened era.'

'And why not then?'

'Well, the warm-hearted peasantry were not so handy with roadside fusillades as at the present day. The population could not have been quite so dense, and Paddy reserved his bullets for the invader, when he looked upon his landlord as a fellow-sufferer.'

'And am I to believe,' said I, 'that if you choose to stand for Westmeath to-morrow, that with your broad acres, ancestral prestige, and liberal politics, you would not be returned?'

'My dear fellow,' answered O'More, 'I *do* say so; and, moreover, *you* would have a better chance almost

than myself, unknown as you are. But were I to cherish the wild ambition to-morrow of representing in the Imperial Parliament the people I have known, and loved, and striven to help rationally all my life, some Dublin shopkeeper, or attorney, would come down, accredited by the priest, or the Fenian subaltern, with a note from a Transatlantic Head Centre, and the goodwill of generations goes for nought. *No,*' added he bitterly, as he struck spurs into St. Dunstan, and the powerful hunter swept with long stride along the narrow highway, 'an Irish Protestant gentleman has *no country.*'

We were decently wet through by the time we reached Morestown. But at dinner, where the gathering in honour of my departure was more extensive than usual, we forgot, under the influence of O'More's glorious claret, both sorrow and debt, and any other of the darker influences that overshadow the heart of man.

'Where's the hurry,' said Antony Daly, 'of your laving us; or, indeed, why need ye go at all? Conldn't ye buy a little houldin' and settle down—or a big one, like Maurice O'Grady, in Galway, for the matter of that? Sure ye'd suit the county all to pieces, for as grand as ye look. Isn't it the pity of the world, Ulick, there isn't an encumbered estate to be sold?'

'I'm quite of your opinion, Antony,' said O'More. 'Do ye think we could find him a wife too?'

'A wife, is it?' said Antony, with ineffable scorn; 'half-a-dozen. Maybe Father Tom would stand to him, and he a foreigner and rides straight. A trifle like that needn't stop him. But did ye ever hear a story of an Englishman that bought Morestown in the great old times of the Encumbered Estates Court?'

'I never did,' said I. 'It must have been awkward.'

'Thrue for you,' assented Antony, filling his glass in a leisurely and contemplative manner; 'and, only ye can't vex the Squire, he'd have been head over heels into the pond—the stableyard that the cowld spring runs through.'

'I see we're in for it, Boldrewood,' said O'More; 'will you fill your glass and pass the bottle? Now then, Antony.'

Looking round with the anticipatory relish of a true *raconteur*, he slowly commenced: 'You must know, years since, a power of estates changed hands under that same court. My heavy curse on it! The rale ould stock who had been country gentlemen all their lives, and intended to be till they died, paying up the interest like men and forgetting the principal altogether, suddenly found themselves called upon to pay up or to see sold and parted with for ever the lands of their forefathers. Some did so, and found themselves genteel beggars. Many broke their hearts. Some took their surplus money, when there *was* a surplus, and did well with it. One day, to be short, a smart, commercial sort of man rode across the lawn here, and finding no one to say him nay, passed into the stableyard, where Ulick was sitting on a horse-block, with a dozen terriers round him.

'"Good morning!" says the stranger, "is this Morestown?" adding half to himself, "Why, a hundred thousand wouldn't buy the place in England."

'"It is," said Ulick, looking hard at him.

'"Well, if that's the case, I've been rightly directed after all," said the unknown. "I hardly thought it was so fine a place, though prices are down awful low, and land is worth next to nothing."

'"Land is worth little enough," said the Squire, "if getting rent be any kind of test; but may I ask how the matter particularly interests you, and to what I am indebted for the honour of your visit?"

'"It's deuced hard, I grant," said the chap; "but the fact is,"—here his voice shook with triumph,—"I've this day *bought Morestown* in the Encumbered Estates Court."

'"The devil you have!" shouted Ulick, and then, rather ashamed of himself, he invited the bold invader to take a glass of wine while he explained the thrifling mistake he had fallen into.'

'And what was it?' I asked, with some anxiety.

'Rache me over the claret, Garnett,' answered the historian; 'sure ye have no consideration for a man who is sacrificin' himself for your amusement, bedad! Well,' continued he, refreshing himself in a protracted and exasperating manner, 'ye know Ireland's the divil's own country for having the same name for more places than one. There was a small, wild, mountainy bit of overgrown farm that happened to be called Morestown, and old Peter More—like his betters—nothing must save him but he must get into debt with every one that would trust him, and sail into the Encumbered Court, all the same as D'Arcy and O'Rourke. Well, the acreage was large, and Mr. Hopkins, who didn't know that the most of it would starve a goat, bid for it like a man, and then went through the country telling every one he had bought Morestown, and asking the way to the place. They tell me he was staggered when old Molly Maguire opened the gates and pointed along the avenue; but he heard that property was frightfully depreciated in Ireland; and sure, when he saw Ulick in the stableyard, he made no doubt but that he was the ruined Squire, and that duelling, dicing, and divilment of all sorts had

brought him low. Ulick was careful to see him put on his way, sending a guide for a few miles. If his rale errand had leaked out among the people he would have needed the apothecary, though we're not "West of Athlone."'

'That's the best thing I've heard for some time,' quoth I approvingly. 'Good enough for Charles Lever—eh, Daly?'

But to this there was no response. A general coldness at the name of the famous novelist seemed to creep over the merry company. It was odd enough that, not for the first time, I had noticed that this prophet had at any rate no honour in his own country. Why it should be I am unable to divine. As a stranger and a foreigner I cannot of course pretend to say of what delicate distinctions of Irish humour he may have failed to take account. He has represented them as a devil-may-care, droll, sensitive, chivalrous nation, so keenly alive to humour that they could jest on the scaffold; holding high the standard of honour, and preferring death to the loss of it; from the lowest to the uppermost strata of society ready to sacrifice present prosperity to bygone sentiment, but loving home and kindred with that unreasoning passion which no thought of gain can change or destroy.

CHAPTER XXI

IT may be that he was wrong; that his keen observation, his lifelong experience were at fault, and that his countrymen are in reality a grave, sententious, reserved, money-making people, moved to relaxation only by the purest Attic wit, and always suspending judgment until

convinced by a logical arrangement of facts. This is the character apparently which every Irishman thinks photographically correct of himself, therefore of his countrymen. So poor Lever is voted in Irish society to be hardly 'good form,' rather broad and unrefined, but smart enough to amuse outsiders—Englishmen, Americans, Australians, and so on.

I defended my much-loved early friend with much warmth and zeal, but I was outvoted. Whereupon Antony Daly immediately sang and partly recited an irresistibly droll description of a country wake, which might have come bodily out of any of Lever's works.

'So you are off to-morrow,' said the genial Squire; 'going to trust yourself within short range of Isidora Blake? You're a lost man, even if you don't break your neck over a stone wall. That brown horse of yours is a clipper; but he looks as if he wouldn't have sense enough to stop at a big wall when his wind was gone.'

'Faith! he *can lep*,' said Antony in a tone of submission. 'I saw that groom of yours (more by token, he's a nate boy, and Nora M'Grath thinks so too) take him over the gate into the Bunsha—it's a foot higher than the others—and he went in and out, and no thanks to him. There's niver a stone wall in Galway or Mayo either will stop him, and if he can take water——'

'He's better at water than at fences,' I said.

'Then by the Cross of Cong! and that's a big oath, you'll show them all the way at Castle Blake, though there's men there won't like being cut down.'

'By Jove!' said the Squire, 'I have two minds to run over next week to the fair at Ballinasloe, buy some store cattle, see Maurice O'Grady and Dillon Blake, and have a run with the hounds. I'd like to see what you make of their country.'

'The very thing I should have liked to ask,' said I, 'had I thought you could get away from home. I should feel as if I had an old friend with me if you came over.'

'You will always have a friend with you as long as Ulick O'More's above ground, and in the same kingdom,' cried the warm-hearted Squire. 'Weren't you as good as a brother to Phil? Sure he told me, and he down-hearted and ready to give in. *No*, boys; may this right hand wither if ever I forget that! So, here's a health to Rolf Boldrewood, and the country that turns out men like him.'

'No heel-taps!' roared Antony Daly, and the whole party rose to their feet and echoed the emotion of their host: 'Here's to Boldrewood and Australia! Begorra, it must be nearly as fine a country as ould Ireland.'

Jim Whitby was sent on betimes the next morning with the horses, and as I rattled off in the Squire's dog-cart, in good time for the train, Antony Daly bade me an enthusiastic farewell, invoking for me 'a fair wind, and the middle of the road.'

. . . . . .

'Well, Jim,' said I, at the first stopping-place where I inspected Pirate and Wanderer, 'what do you think of the place we have just left?'

'Splendid country, sir; couldn't be better—feed as good as I ever seen—cattle lookin' grand; but the old story, sir—overstocked.'

'I thought you said the cattle looked first-rate,' I objected.

'It's not the cattle, sir, as I'm talking of, it's the people—the men and the women. How can they expect to do any good, and they stuck as thick as mallee saplings in a scrub? The Squire's all right; he's a gentleman every inch of him; and the stable is kept

first-rate ; the servants' hall couldn't be beat in England; but once you're outside the gates it's all up.'

'How do you mean?' said I.

'Well, sir, look at the bits of cabins, and the people mouchin' about by the score ; whatever they find to do half their time I can't make out. The soil's wet, there's no timber, and nothing to grow but potatoes ; when that goes, down goes everything.'

'The picture is a sad one,' said I ; 'but who are to blame—the former proprietors who encouraged population, or these simple people who, being born here, cannot be made to see why they are so "unnecessary"?'

'That's all right, sir,' replied the denizen of a new and happier land ; 'but why haven't they pluck enough to put swags on their backs and make tracks? I mean, why don't they clear out for America, or Australia, or New Zealand, or New Guinea—anywhere but this used-up old country?'

'Very true, Jim, I am much of your opinion ; but remember these people are not accustomed, like our countrymen, to move off a hundred miles, or a thousand, at a week's notice. They know little of the world ; have no curiosity about anything but the narrow limits of their villages. No wonder that it takes years to form the opinion that they must leave the home of their forefathers.'

'Home!' said Jim ; 'if it was worth calling a home I'd forgive 'em ; but look at these miamas that we're a-passin' now—mud walls, rotten roofs, no chimneys, no winder, no floor, no garden, half an acre of wet potato land, and a man and wife and ten children to live out of it! I suppose it always rains too. Talk about a free selector in Australia being miserably off—why, he's a *king* to nearly everybody here.'

'Why, yes, Jim,' I said, smiling at the vehemence

so unusual for him. 'I suppose a selector, with forty acres of a creek flat, a few cows, two or three mares, a team of bullocks, a few acres of corn, plenty of pigs, and chickens, and a little well-paid carrying in the wool season, with no winter weather to speak off, is in a better position. Yet how they grumble, too, and tell you farming doesn't pay!'

'Wait till I go back,' said Jim wrathfully; 'I'll talk to 'em—them as are natives don't know when they're well off; and as for that Murty Sullivan and Jerry Murphy, and two or three old Paddies, as lives where I come from, down at Shoalhaven, see how I'll shut 'em up when I go back.'

'Why?' I inquired.

'Well, the yarns they used to spin me about the way they've been used to live,' returned my indignant henchman. 'My mother was an Irishwoman, and she, bless her old heart, always said she was thankful for plenty, and that Australia was the best place she had ever seen or heard of; but these old vagabones! you'd think they'd been used to roast beef and plum-pudding every day in their lives instead of potatoes—and half rations of them sometimes.'

'Well, that's harmless national vanity, Jim,' said I.

'It's dashed lying—that's what I call it, begging pardon,' quoth the uncompromising James; 'and then, when they was out brush-fencing, or lambin', or some other humbuggin' work, you'd think they was a-goin' to die if there wasn't meat for breakfast. I don't say they aren't as good as other people; but when they come to a country where they have all they can eat and waste, in the way of good bread and meat, and a better place to live in than they ever had before, and wood and water, and tea and sugar for nothing—and double and treble wages,

why don't they say, "Well, this is a country worth coming to, and I was glad I was put in the way of getting to it"?'

'And don't they praise the country?'

'No, not they; that's where it's mean of 'em. They take all sorts of points, and grumble about the food and the wages, and because the slabs are a little open, and swear at the cook; and would make you believe, if you was that soft, that they'd lived like fighting cocks, and that the Colony was under a compliment to 'em for coming.'

At the next railway station a middle-aged man, with a cheerful countenance and a bright eye, got in; and as I happened to be the sole occupant of the first-class carriage that he entered, we struck up an acquaintance. I may remark, that everywhere in Ireland the greater warmth and cordiality of the national manner made itself apparent. We were soon in full chat about the look of the country, the prospects of the crop, the difference of English and Irish farming, and so on. He had left London only two days before, and was going down to Galway, where Lambert Danvers, of Castle Danvers, I subsequently found, was a man of note and consideration. He never doubted that I was an Englishman, and took my brown face for the result of Indian campaigning, or foreign travel.

'Haven't been in Ireland before?' he said. 'Thought not; well, I must do a little guide-book. Here we are at the Shannon. There's Athenry, and we shall soon be west of Athlone, where the King's writ in old days had very insufficient authority.'

'There's quite a flavour of Lever about all this,' said I; 'I'd give a good deal to meet him out here and have a week's talk.'

'It would not have been improbable last year,' said

my new friend. 'I knew Lever and Hamilton Maxwell intimately; the latter was staying with me once, long ago—and a jollier companion couldn't be. Lever was touchy, though. Do you remember those *Novels by Eminent Hands?*'

'Yes! *George Barnwell*, *Codlings Hot*, and the rest?'

'Thackeray told me that Lever was the only man who never forgave him that bit of satirical pleasantry.'

'He could have afforded it well,' said I; 'but, being an Irishman, of course he could not be expected to take a joke at his own expense. I beg your pardon.'

'Oh! don't mind me in the least. We *are* a lot of thin-skinned devils; but you Saxons have had us under heel so long that we are only just beginning, like other conquered races, to give up snarling, and scheming for revenge, and so on. The Danvers were Englishmen a few generations back; but there's something in the soil, or the air, or the whisky—one can't say what it is—but now we're as Celtic as our neighbours.'

'I shouldn't say that; the untravelled men of any country are those who possess the national prejudices in full strength. Educated Britons are pretty much alike.'

'You've been about the world a good deal, I take it,' said he, looking keenly at my bronzed countenance and thick beard.

'Moderately,' I answered; 'but as we have got so far into the argument, it is only fair to tell you that this is my first visit to Britain.'

'Do you tell me that?' said my genial companion; 'then where the dickens *do* you come from? You're not a Yankee, anyhow.'

'Did you ever hear of a country called Australia?' I asked.

'Botany Bay? Of course I have; haven't I a cousin there—and didn't Tom French, of Monivae, go out there, though that was to South Australia, Victoria, I think, was the town? And were ye born there?'

'I had that honour,' said I.

'Well, but you talk English; I don't say well—that of course—but exactly like everybody else, not a bit of accent or anything.'

'I trust so, but why shouldn't I? I have lived with English people, have been taught out of English books, always heard English spoken, and thought in English all the days of my life.'

'True enough—true; still it strikes one as rather strange that you should be such an exact copy of any young fellow in the parks or clubs—excuse me—barring the tan—and you never to have seen old England at all till a few months ago. Well, it bangs Banagher,' concluded he, taking refuge in the vernacular.

'What town is this?' I inquired, as we slackened speed near an unpretending, though populous country town.

'Tuam—no less, and an archbishopric till very lately,' said my friend.

'Indeed,' said I; 'then here we part; Blake was to send a trap to meet me; it's no great distance to his place.'

'Twenty miles, and a bad road; but Isidora Blake has a pair of eyes that will light up the whole place if it's getting dark.'

'I have met Miss Blake,' said I, 'if you allude to her in that very creditable compliment for a middle-aged man.'

'I am a fogey, and the father of a family besides; but I'm Isidora's sworn admirer, for all that. Give her my love, but' (and here his frank face altered somewhat) 'keep a look-out for old Dillon. He has a fine bluff, paternal manner; no man can ever say he drank a glass of bad wine at Mount Blake; but he's a dead nail about money matters, and he'd humbug Father Peter.'

'Thanks for the caution,' said I; 'I had a hint in the same direction before. But we shan't probably go into business matters much; and now good-bye.'

'Not till you've promised to stop a month at Castle Danvers; you can easily get over. I can find you reasonable hunting, better shooting, and some fishing, that will recall *Wild Sports of the West*, that I see you are well up in. Don't say no.'

'I won't indeed; nothing would give me greater pleasure, but I must pay my visit to Blake first.'

'I know,' he replied with a keen look; 'ladies first. I'll be over at Ballinasloe more than likely.'

I disembarked, and stood with a somewhat forlorn air at the unpretending station which had been allotted to Tuam. The said Tuam (popularly pronounced Chume) may have been a deuce of a place some time or other, though why it should have necessitated the presence of an archbishop, I was unable to imagine. Its present pretensions were moderate. The streets were narrow, and by no means straight; the houses were old, small, and chiefly ruinous; the population was dense, but poverty-stricken, ragged, and clamorous in an unknown tongue. While the rain as usual poured ceaselessly down. As the shoeless crowd gathered knee-deep in mud around a ruined cross, near which were scales, for it was a market day, I thought I had never witnessed a stranger sight. Jim looked

round anxiously for the appearance of the railway hotel of the period, or some hostelry to which civilised stabling pertained, as the rain dripped from the rugs of his shrinking horses.

'By George, sir, we've got into the bush at last; wasn't there to be a chap to meet us? Can't we get a stall anywhere for the horses, or are we to camp out?'

Here a well-grown, broad-faced lad, about fourteen, with the deepest humility, implored us, for the love of all the saints, to give him a halfpenny.

'Oh, murder,' said Jim, in tones of genuine surprise, 'think of that; here's a chap that where we come from would be driving bullocks or stock-keeping, or learning to plough, with a full ration, and ten shillings a week, smoking his own tobacco, and buying the best of clothes, and here he is asking for a halfpenny. What's your name, you useless young whelp?'

'Tim Delany, your honour.'

'Well, Tim, show us your best hotel, where they keep a good stable.'

'Sure, there's the ould 'Chume Arrums,' where all the gintlemen of the hunt do go.'

'All right, Tim; we want to go there too—step out; here's a shilling.'

We found the inn a comfortable, old-fashioned place, where Jim speedily made his horses snug, and after a glass of hot whisky and water, I felt more in harmony with the climate and the inhabitants of the foreign land to which destiny had conducted us.

'Is there a gentleman for Mount Blake come down by the train?' said the landlord respectfully, as he opened the door, and inquired of society generally; 'Mr. Blake's servant is here to meet him.'

I answered in the affirmative, and that functionary

entered, full of cordiality, and anxious to have the honour of conveying me instantly to Mount Blake.

Upon being asked why he had not met me at the train according to appointment, he excused himself, professing great sorrow for the omission, by the statement that the dog-cart had been out of order, and that he was obliged to superintend personally its repair.

This little explanation over, we started for Mount Blake, which we reached just about the time when we should have needed the moon or lamps, or Isidora's eyes, to light up the lonely road. When we drew up before a large, irregular, picturesque-looking pile, there was no lack of observance of any sort which might have led a stranger not to question, but to reason upon, the fact of his being welcome.

Jim was pounced upon by a head groom with a band of helpers, and carried off bodily to the stables; while Dillon Blake rushed down the steps, with a radiant countenance, and grasping my hand before I could descend from the dog-cart, greeted me as if I had been a long-lost brother, his father-in-law elect, and his rich uncle from India, all rolled into one.

'Me dear fellow,' said he, 'and do I see ye in Galway? Sure we thought ye'd never come, and the hunting season well on. Isidora said ye'd have too many London engagements to think of us here in the far west. "May be so," says I; "but he's a man of his word." I saw it in your face, me boy, and I was right. Now, Darby, just take Mr. Boldrewood straight to his room; there's a good fire there, I'll go bail; and by the time he's dressed, dinner will be as near ready as ould Biddy ever has it at the proper hour. A thimbleful of whisky to keep the cold out? No! then off with ye.'

The chamber was spacious into which I was ushered, the furniture modern; a glorious turf fire, glowing with

a penetrative heat, filled the wide, old-fashioned fireplace. As Darby, with practised hand, unlocked my portmanteau and arranged my evening garments ready for use, I threw myself into an easy-chair before the fire, and felt a well-grounded confidence in the success of my first evening in Galway.

'Dinner in half an hour, sir!' said Darby; 'and the master's timper gets hot as the soup gets cold.'

Auguring favourably for the cuisine from this hint of punctuality, unexpected in Galway and sufficiently remarkable in any part of Ireland, I faced the duties of the toilet with resolution, and within the allotted time gained the drawing-room.

Blake himself, in correct evening toggery, which toned down the somewhat unnecessary glow of his felt cordiality and high-bred frankness, led me to a group of ladies in full dress, who were standing by the chimney-piece.

'Isidora will tell you she hasn't forgotten you, Boldrewood; and here's Harriet, that doesn't talk much, but thinks a good deal—eh, Harrie? Miss Rose O'Hara, here's a gentleman come all the way from Australia, because of a photograph your cousin Darcy showed him in Sydney; true as I'm here, so ye needn't blush. Miss Katie Ffrench, allow me to present to you Mr. Boldrewood, one of the best riders in Britain. I won't say what Maurice O'Grady said of him—for he's modest.'

'What! Maurice O'Grady?' said the last young lady, to whom I was so pleasingly described; 'well, I never heard that of him before, and I don't know that his riding does any country credit. But we'll soon find out all about Mr. Boldrewood's riding after he has been out with your hounds once or twice.'

'Yes; but we must remember that he is our guest,'

interposed Isidora, with a certain dignified authority; 'and I'm not going to have him killed or flattered into suicide, for the entertainment of the Mount Blake Hunt, and Miss Katie Ffrench.'

I begged to express the utmost thankfulness to Miss Blake, and 'trusted she would continue to protect me for a while from the Hunt and Miss Ffrench.' After a slight reconnaissance I felt confident I should be able to defend myself and country against all-comers in the tournament.

'Biddy's not long for this world; she's gaining in punctuality daily!' suddenly ejaculated Blake. 'Boldrewood, will ye give your arm to Miss Blake? Jack, take in Miss Ffrench. Rosie, me darlin', ye'll take pity on an old man. Harriet, his riverence has his eye on ye.'

I was not long in concluding that Blake's leaning towards punctuality, though circumstances prevented its invariable attainment, was a favourable symptom. The dinner was excellent, having the usual advantages of the country, inasmuch as the home-grown contributions were faultless in quality. Four-year-old mutton; utterly peerless trout, for which the neighbourhood of Loch Corrib is famed; pheasants kept till the precise day, after which crispness would depart and flavour fade. These and other constituents, washed down by claret, of which my host was justly proud, caused me to forget the rain, the roads, the unaccustomed aspect of everything, but the exceedingly pleasant surroundings of our deferred but satisfactory repast.

'Did anybody see or hear anything of O'Grady?' asked Mr. Blake suddenly; 'he hasn't been here for a week. Sure I can't get on without him. Jack, you're all about the country, did you see him?'

'I did, uncle, yesterday.'

'And what did he say?'

'He asked if the Englishman had come yet. I said no, but was to arrive to-day, I believed. He said he was the dearest friend he had in the world; but he had an appointment to meet a cattle-dealer at Ballinasloe, and he must go.'

'That's O'Grady all over,' said I; 'I remember his borrowing a horse after dinner and riding sixty miles one night.'

'All very wonderful,' said Miss Harriet; 'but what was the use of this superhuman exertion—what was gained by it?'

'O'Grady prided himself on his punctuality, and used to say that he never missed an appointment, failed in a promise, or dishonoured a bill.'

'All capital traits of character, particularly the last, bedad; but you want to be in funds, or in credit equal to cash, to run your banker so close. I suppose Maurice was lucky in his ventures?'

'It is said,' I answered, 'that he made a couple of hundred thousand pounds in ten years, and he has some of his finest property left.'

'Australia must be a grand country,' affirmed Mr. Blake. 'Ye don't know of an opening for a man that's a fair judge of stock, and in the prime of life—eh, Miss Ffrench? And to think of Maurice O'Grady retiring upon a haul like that. Sure I remember like yesterday the day he sailed. Didn't he come to me for advice?'

'To you, papa?' asked Isidora, with a genuine expression of surprise, while Harriet and Kate Ffrench laughed, and Miss O'Hara looked incredulous.

'Yes! to me, Dillon Blake,' said the old man proudly; 'and who would have a better right to advise him than his father's old friend?'

'Isn't it the fun of the world?' said Isidora, with

an arch look upon her regal features, which made her appear a condescending queen deigning to smile at the mirth of her attendants, 'and what was he like then?'

'A thin slip of a lad, hardly grown up, with a half-shy, half-bold look about his face that I couldn't quite make out. He had a soft way of talking too; but after I tried to dissuade him from going, and he told me quietly that his guardian had said the same thing, and that he was going all the same, and had taken his passage, I left off. So he bade me good-bye, and left me thinking how fortunate some people were in getting rid of their relatives, when the door opened, and in came his head—you know the way he has of putting his head in at a door, and laughing? and says he, "Dillon Blake, would ye advise me to take these?"

'"What do ye mean by *these?*" said I,—"a wife and family, or a score of Kerry cows. How can I tell ye, unless you show me?"

'"Well, these"; and suddenly he stretched out his long arms, with an old-fashioned duelling-pistol in each hand. I ducked my head, for I thought his reflections about emigration might have turned his brain.

'"Good heavens, Maurice," said I, "do nothing rash." He placed the pistols on the table, and laughed till the tears ran down his face.

'"Sure, you're easily frightened, Dillon," said he; "and all I wanted you to tell me was, whether it was worth me while to take me father's ould peace-makers. This one, d'ye see now, was always counted lucky in the family. It's a saw-handle, and more by token, there's five crosses on it."

'"Go to the deuce, or Botany Bay, if you like," says I in a towering passion—and he went; and now, ye see, he's made a quarter of a million, and all by taking my advice.'

CHAPTER XXII

WE all laughed at the credit which our host bestowed upon himself for the far-seeing counsel which he believed he had given O'Grady, and so laid the foundation of his fortune.

'It looks as if Mr. O'Grady had made up his mind, and then paid you and his guardian the compliment of acquainting you with the fact,' said Harriet. 'He always talks as if he were in the most undecided state; but it's my belief that he's very cool and obstinate.'

'You're quite right there, Miss Harriet,' said I. 'You have studied his character with some effect. A more obstinate man does not live.'

'I expect him here to-morrow,' said Blake. 'We might drive over to Ballinasloe and see the fair. Then ye can go back to Sydney, and say ye saw a horse lep the pound wall.'

'What's the real height of this historical jump?' I inquired. 'I've heard my father speak of it when I was a boy. He was all over your country with the Marquis of Watermore, when they were both young men.'

'I wonder the Marquis didn't jump it himself,' said the Squire; 'he was divil enough for anything.'

'Somebody goes over it every year,' asserted Katie Ffrench; 'it's a big jump, but the wall is old, and I fancy a stone gets rolled off now and then.'

'Anything over five feet is a good leap,' said I; 'and I shall be delighted to drink the health of any man and horse that go clean over.'

'My dears!' said Mrs. Blake, rising with that indescribable expression which plainly says, 'The ladies have remained sufficiently long in this doubtful moral atmosphere, and now, really, there's a slight escape of carbonic acid gas, and we had better——' and so on.

They swept gracefully out. I was not far from the drawing-room door, when he who thinks a glance from a pair of bright eyes sufficient guerdon for a comparatively small effort, will not fail to have his hand upon the portal. As I drew back, with a slight bow and as much expression as I could throw into my inexpressive visage, I was rewarded with a meaning sparkle from the wonder-orbs of Isidora Blake, that sent me back to my seat an indescribably happy man.

'Now, my boy,' said Mr. Blake, filling his glass, and motioning me to do the same, 'how about the hunting? Ye've brought a couple of good horses, I hear; and maybe ye'll pick up another about Ballinasloe that will show them how to lep when ye go back to England. Ye'll want a horse that has seen a stone wall before.'

'I have one horse, Mr. Blake, that's good, they tell me, for height—and Wanderer, I am informed, can sail over anything that can fairly be called a water-jump. But I should like to get hold of a regular Galway stone-wall performer. Indeed, I'm not sure that I wouldn't take him all the way to Sydney when I've done with him.'

'D'ye tell me so, now?' said the old man with enthusiasm. 'Time was when Dillon Blake could have found ye the horse, and ridden him for ye too. But my day's gone, and I can only boast of the good old times and sigh over them.'

'Doesn't this fair come on to-morrow?' said I.

'Ballinasloe—the very thing,' said he. 'We'll drive

over to-morrow, and ye'll see the sort of sheep and cattle we grow, and maybe a horse, that with all your refined notions—and I see you're not so very easy to please—you'll call a rale Galway blazer.'

'The very thing,' said I. 'Probably O'Grady will be there. I feel anxious to meet an Australian friend and brother squatter again.'

'Did Maurice drive the roan horses in that spider-wheeled trap he got from America?' asked Blake.

'He did,' answered Jack Ffrench; 'he passed me as I was coming here, and it seemed as if he was going about twenty miles an hour.'

'Does he drive trotters and a buggy?' said I; 'why doesn't he stick to the carriage of his native land? Not but what a jaunting-car is a trifle slow, primitive, and entirely at the mercy of the elements.'

'Well, Maurice said something of that kind,' said Jack, 'and also that he had not been used to bumping about like a pig-jobber in a car, or running the risk of his neck in a dogcart; so he sent all the way to America for the horses and the carriage.'

'And how do they work?' I asked.

'Sure, we all thought the trap would smash to pieces,' said Jack; 'but the first time I drove with O'Grady I found the difference. His horses can trot sixteen miles an hour comfortably, and it's more like flying then driving—it's so fast and easy.'

'Buggies are capital machines,' I affirmed. 'I don't know what we should do without them in the colonies, and the Yankee that invented them should have a statue.'

'Take a white-washer of this rather curious sherry, and we'll join the ladies,' said Blake. 'We don't do the four-bottle business in these latter days; but my grandfather, Brabazon Blake, would have called you

out at anything short of it, and done his best to shoot you too. More by token, one of the crosses on Maurice O'Grady's saw-handle is from *him*.'

'How the deuce did that happen?' I asked, rather startled.

'Well, ye see, Terence O'Grady was one of those ould divils that wouldn't let his dearest friend look crooked at him. Well, ye see, the hounds met at Castle O'Grady one fine day, and they had the divil's own run. When they came back, O'Grady had a hogshead of claret broached on the lawn for all hands. They did justice to the generous character of the entertainer. One man died after it. Many lay around the butt unconscious till the morning, and my grandfather, Brabazon, who was unluckily there, fell foul of old Terence, who was in one of his fiendish humours, and they had a few words. It was enough. Both smiled and bowed affably. But in the chill dawn of the autumn morn they stood opposite to each other (how the deuce they got up so early after a heavy night, as by all accounts they had, I cannot make out; I couldn't get up before ten, if the Pope was going to shoot me with his infallible and holy right hand), and there was old Terence, with his smiling face, and cold, cruel eyes—*and* the saw-handle. At the first fire he lifted his hat with a hole through it; but Brabazon Blake was lying with his face among the daisies, and a bullet through his heart.'

'How old was he?' said I, with a thrill of regret at the sudden eclipse of such a bold rider's soul.

'Sixty-five; he was one of the handsomest men of his day; was thrice married; had travelled much; and left more than one antagonist on the sod himself.'

'He had a good innings,' said Jack Ffrench; 'they

had great luck in those old times. I vote for a cup of coffee.'

When we had successfully navigated the regions that lay between us and the drawing-room, we were rewarded, like other bold voyagers, by unexpected discoveries. The tones of a really good piano gave token that music and song were awaiting us; and when we marched in, with that virtuous, abstinent air which men generally assume on joining the ladies, I observed that various brilliant recruits had reinforced the company. There were divers and sundry young ladies, mostly fair to look upon, and who were after the fashion of Galway nearly all O'Malleys, Brownes, Lynches, or O'Flahertys, with, of course, a few more Blakes, and Ffrenches. They had driven over in a neighbourly way, and constituted very efficient material for an impromptu dance, which I could see was more than probable.

'We began to think that papa was reviving the family traditions,' said Miss Blake, 'and that you and Jack wouldn't be suffered to escape alive. I wasn't sure whether it wasn't the fashion in Australia to leave the dining-room early.'

Here I conveyed as much tender reproach into my eyes as could be telegraphed.

'Oh, I daresay, you are quite above that kind of thing; and so, now you are here, let me introduce you to these young ladies, great friends of mine—and mildly curious about you; Jack will make you acquainted with the men.'

'Too much honour,' said I; 'but are we going to dance, and if so, may I petition for a waltz, one galop, not far from the last, and then — Fate may do her worst?'

'Well, I think you may reckon on so much, though

I don't know how our styles will suit; and I'm particular about my partners.'

'So am I, if you will permit me to say so; and now, who is the slight, fair young lady, with "eyes as blue as damsons, and pounds of auburn curls"?'

'Well, she's the clergyman's daughter, Miss Lynch; she's the best girl in the world—that's her character; she minds the house, the poor, the poultry, the garden, and the parish.'

'Does everything but write her father's sermons,' said I.

'I wish she'd do that too,' returned Miss Blake; 'they would be more interesting, I'll answer for it.'

I was soon on good terms with the other guests. They were all anxious to be kind and friendly to the stranger from so far a land. The music struck up—the large and wide room being cleared—and I was soon whirling round with a tall, Spanish-looking girl, who danced as if the Moorish admixture of blood, which the old Galway families admit, had lent a more than ordinary 'verve' and elasticity to her movements.

In the intervals Blake and I, with the younger men of the county, talked a little hunting, and I was politely examined as to my views and principles.

'Had I seen the Galway stone walls? and did I think my horses could negotiate them without more experience?'

'Walls were stiff and high in their way,' I answered; 'but I had seen worse jumps, and probably higher than any stone walls; at any rate, the falling would be soft, and that was a great matter.'

'You're right there,' said Dick Bourke; 'the falling's easy enough; but ye didn't come here all the way to see what the falling was like. And ye don't think much

of stone walls. I never was much out of the west, and I don't know what timber fences may be like; but I'll lay ye an even fiver ye're not up the first time the fox heads for Dangan.'

'Done with you!' said I, 'and with any one else. I take it for granted the country is rough; but my horses are in good form, and my groom tells me they are fit to go. If they can't, I must buy a hunter or two here.'

'See here, now, O'Malley, Bourke, and the rest of ye—I'll fine any man a dozen of claret that says another word about horses before supper,' said Blake authoritatively. 'We're just going to have a trifle to support nature; about two dances after—and then to bed; for we're respectable early people at Mount Blake—eh, Miss Lynch?'

'I trust so, indeed, Mr. Blake,' said that young lady, blushing at being appealed to; 'but I should think you're the last person likely to need a certificate for prudence. If it was Mr. Jack Ffrench here.'

'Don't be laughing at me, Miss Lynch, and calling me prudent, and other bad names. The Blakes were always hasty—it was their way; but our hearts are where they ought to be—eh, boys?'

Here the worthy host tucked the prettiest girl he could find under his arm and marched into supper, leaving Mrs. Blake to her own devices, and having given me the hint to possess myself temporarily of Miss Blake, which I forthwith proceeded to do.

Well, 'supper,' thou'rt indeed a pleasant thing—although one must be d—d for thee, no doubt, in the way of indigestion, next-morning miseries, and so on. Perhaps the vanities of life never so dazzle with delusive splendour—unreal, of unearthly glow and sparkle—never do fancy, hope, imagination, so drape them-

selves in garb of light as at a pleasant supper-party, verging on the small hours.

When the queen of the hour, by Fate's fortunate decree, sits by your side, when her eyes meet yours, and catch a momentary gleam, shy and evanescent, from your earnest gaze, the cup of enchantment is full—all life's sublime possibilities appear tangible and realised.

We left the table together. At the first notes of 'the War Galop' I clasped Isidora's yielding waist, and we swept forth with the swift, sympathetic measure of that glorious dance. I felt as if our hearts already beat in unison.

Could I bear away to my own land this glorious embodiment of my early poet-dreams, my life's happiness was assured. Who has not dreamed such dreams? Who has not been awakened? Still 'twere better to have loved and lost, better to have mourned the dear long-buried past, than to live coldly sceptical of the heart's purest feelings, ignorant of the fresh joys of immortal youth!

We had done justice to the music, praised the floor, and discovered mutual tastes of a strikingly harmonious tendency; Mrs. Blake had made an ominous flank movement, only retarded by the fact that the gay Dillon had disappeared with his partner and could nowhere be found—when the door partially opened, and the expressive countenance of Mr. Maurice O'Grady presented itself.

His appearance was the signal for a volley of questions, congratulations, reproaches, and other conversational weapons, which seemed to be hurled at him on all sides. At the first pause he rushed up to me, and accosted me with the warmth which had evidently lost none of its fervour from his residence in Australia.

'And is it you, me dear fellow, Rolf Boldrewood,

no less—and do we meet in Galway? It's little I ever expected this pleasure when we parted at the old Australian club and I sold you those RHD store cattle, though of course we met at the Derby.'

'And a very bad lot they were,' said I,—'all horns and as wild as buffaloes; but we mustn't talk shop here. I think we are going to have one more dance.'

'That's the very thing I came for, as soon as the muster was over—I mean the fair; and sure I drove into a farmer and two ould women with cows on the road. Oh, I see Miss Harriet!'

And off rushed the energetic Maurice, as unwilling to waste time or neglect business as he had ever been in Australia.

The cheeriest of parties came to an end—farewells were said—cloaks and shawls arranged, with the usual difficulty and need for assistance. But eventually the guests departed, and Jack Ffrench, O'Grady, and I made ourselves comfortable in the smoking-room—to enjoy that pleasantest final pipe or cigar after any kind of revelry and before bed.

'Well, Boldrewood,' propounded O'Grady, 'sure ye're the divil's own boy for dancing. The very last thing I saw of ye in Australia, ye were dancing at the Club ball; and here, the first thing I see of ye, in Galway, ye're going at the rate of twenty miles an hour, holding on by the prettiest girl in the country—the old story.'

'There couldn't be a better excuse,' answered I; 'but think again, Maurice; didn't I and Maxwell go off in the boat with you, after the ball, to the mail steamer? I couldn't have been dancing then.'

'Right, Rolf, right,' admitted he; 'more be token, I nearly dropped something overboard, out of the boat, that we shouldn't have picked up again.'

'Yes, indeed, it was a close thing enough,' said I. 'Do you know what it was, Mr. Blake, that Maurice allowed to slip through his fingers?'

'A lady's picture, or one of the peace-makers, or his pocket-book,' said the host lazily; 'he's not the most careful man about trifles, I should say.'

'It wasn't that exactly,' I said; 'but that evening I went to the bank with him, as he wanted some coin for use on the voyage. It was after hours, but being an important constituent, the clerk had instructions to let him have what he might please to want.'

'"I want some sovereigns," quoth Maurice; "I'm going home by India, and may have a little divarsion by the way. Just get me some in a bag, will ye now, me friend?"

'"How many will you require, sir?" said the careful clerk,—"a hundred?"

'"A hundred!" roared Maurice, bringing his hand down on the counter; "what's the good of a hundred pounds? Give me a thousand."

'And a thousand he got—all in a bag, strong and well sewed; and it was this very bag which he nearly dropped over the side of the boat as we pulled over to the *China*.'

'D'ye tell me so?' said Blake. 'Bedad, as I said before, Australia must be a fine country, when ye carry about thousands like that. I ought to have gone with Maurice—and now, what about to-morrow, what are we to do?'

'Ballinasloe against the country,' said O'Grady; 'the ladies will come for an hour, and I'll drive Rolf over in me buggy. I want him to see me roan trotters. He'll fancy himself in Australia again.'

'Are they as good as the greys you used to drive, Maurice,' said I; 'and that you left at Castleton, when you came away?'

'I shall never drive their like again,' said he, rather sadly; 'but these are fast and handsome, and matched to a hair. I wouldn't have ye miss Ballinasloe for a hundred pounds. Ye'll think yerself back on one of those Murray runs—only for the rain, and the people, and the fights, and the pigs, and the peelers, and the stone walls!'

'We shall see,' I answered. 'I want to see the Galway and Roscommon horses well represented, as well as the cattle and sheep. Also, I hope to see the pound wall jumped.'

'It's settled,' said Blake, concluding his cigar; 'we'll all go. I haven't missed a fair for forty years, and Maurice, I know, wants to buy stock as usual. Jack, you'll pilot Boldrewood to his quarters. Good-night!'

The day was wet, of course; it was an exceptionally wet year. Ireland, moist at the best of times, was apparently selected this season by Jupiter Pluvius to work out a calculation as to how much rain any given country could suffer and live.

It was fifteen Irish miles, so our party started immediately after breakfast—Mrs. Blake and her daughters in the family carriage, a spacious and commodious, though antiquated vehicle. O'Grady drove me, according to promise, in a buggy, which he had ordered to be carefully built in Sydney before he sailed, and brought home with him.

It was rather higher than the average of these wonderfully light, easy, durable vehicles, and had a hood, which protected the occupants of the front seat, as a close mail phaeton. This was found extremely useful on this present occasion. On the back seat, which was small and unprotected, sat Mr. Jim Whitby, enveloped in an ample overcoat, over which he had donned a gutta-percha wrapper, so extensive that his profession

or calling was entirely concealed from the world. As the fast American trotters quietly slipped off over the macadamised but sloppy highway, a shower of mud flew around us which, but for our wraps and precautions, would have made us difficult of recognition.

'Isn't it the divil's own country for wet weather?' said O'Grady, ruefully beholding his slender wheels and delicately formed trap, splashed to the eyes, so to speak. 'What's the use of a dacent pair of goers? Sure, you might as well exercise them in a ploughed field or a water-meadow. Except Port Fairy, in Western Victoria, I never saw such a place for rain and mud.'

'Never mind, O'Grady,' said I, 'think of the doctrine of compensation. You have no droughts here, no sandy blight, no mosquitoes, no water drying up in the back country. You have plenty of turf, a sufficiency of whisky, and agreeable society,—you must make the best of it, old fellow!'

'So I do; but ye're ramming it down my throat every day that this is the finest country in the world, and almost forcing me to return thanks that I'm back alive from your barbarous land. It's hard to bear sometimes. May I never! if I don't have a strong feeling come over me sometimes, that I'd be happier on the banks of the Murray again.'

'Pooh, pooh!' said I, 'what does an Irishman with a lot of money like you want out of his own country again? It was all very well while you were making it.'

'While I was making it,' interrupted he, as his hawk eyes glistened; 'I was happier then, Rolf, than I ever shall be again. I worked hard—you know how hard—with mind and body; but both were able to stand the strain; and, by Jove! those night rides over plain and forest were glorious things.'

'Nonsense; you'll settle down here and marry Harriet Blake, and turn into a worshipful old gentleman who has a good estate. How came you to get the roans? They go well together.'

'I brought home the buggy, as you know, for I fancied I could drive myself a good deal, and I didn't care about a jaunting-car (ye might as well drive a water-cart for pleasure) or a dog-cart at the mercy of the weather, and that Irish weather. So I tried to get a couple of harness horses to my mind.'

'Well, I should think there was no difficulty about that,' said I.

'Oh, wasn't there; either they didn't trot decently, or couldn't go together, or didn't understand double harness and fourteen miles an hour. Whatever it was, I could get nothing but what, for slowness or unsuitability, Jack Bulmer used to call "hearse horses." Ye remember Jack?'

'Rather!' said I; 'but how did you stumble on the roans?'

'Thinking of these things, and smoking, one night, I recollected Mushing and Co., Burgold's agents in New York. I telegraphed for a reasonably fast buggy pair —price a thousand dollars. I had an answer next day— "Shipped by steamer *President*, pair roan buggy horses, age seven, pace 2-40. Remit on delivery." That was all the correspondence about them, and here they are.'

'And here we are, I suppose. Is this the venerable and once important town of Ballinasloe which we are approaching?'

'It is, and yonder is the Suck, which, with the Shannon, is one of the boundaries of the County of Galway. There appear to be some good cattle and sheep. Pity you have no country to put them on. Daresay, though, you'd find the price rather high.'

Immediately in front of us, as we neared the town, was a high tandem, with well-bred-looking brown horses neatly handled by a sporting-looking personage, gaitered, great-coated, and buttoned up, who might have sat for the portrait of Mr. Miles Bodkin of Bodkin Bog.

'D'ye see that chap there?' said O'Grady; 'he's a favourite aversion of mine; he has a small bit of an estate a few miles from here, and he's going to buy a pen or two of cattle to-day. He'll make more fuss about them than we should if we were buying five thousand head to stock a Paroo run with. Everlastingly running down the colonies too.'

'Doesn't he approve of colonies?' I inquired. 'How distressing for them! What's his august name?'

'Well, he's Kirwan of Newtown-Kirwan; educated in England; an infernal prig, and I hate the sight of him.'

And, with this expression of opinion, the fervent Maurice took his horses by the head; and those intelligent animals, as soon as they felt the reins tighten, made one rush into their 2-40 form, which sent us past Mr. Kirwan and his tandem with the smoothly superior speed of a locomotive passing a mail-coach.

I had just observed a contemptuous and rather shocked expression upon the face of a beardless and supercilious youth when we entered the town and pulled up at the principal hotel. Resigning the roans to Jim, he departed into the inn yard and was seen no more.

When we entered the principal room of the hotel, the steam of hot whisky punch was nearly as noticeable as that arising from damp people, damp clothes, damp earth, air, sky, everything. The country gentlemen there assembled were strongly in evidence that the humidity of the climate had been successfully combated

by the exhibition of the alcoholic manufacture of the land. Never had I seen a more athletic, energetic-looking race than the representatives of 'the tribes,' who that day had mustered in force.

CHAPTER XXIII

THERE was a shout of welcome as O'Grady and I came in.

'Well, Maurice,' said a fresh-coloured, broad-backed, elderly man, 'how many head are you going to buy to-day? Will ye leave us a few, or do ye want the whole lot yourself? There are only 16,000 head of cattle and 80,000 sheep.'

Here everybody laughed, as though these numbers represented such a quantity of stock as the mind of man could barely grasp; while the idea of their being purchased by one holder, or even a dozen, was wholly untenable.

'I do want a few cattle, though I've hardly land enough to put a decent herd on. But what are they, after all? If I were across the water, where there is a little spare country,—not like this damp old cabbage garden of yours that you call a kingdom,—I'd buy the whole lot, half cash and half at six months, and find a place to put them on too.'

'People tell me that much of Western Australia—isn't that where you lived, Mr. O'Grady?—is very sandy, by no means rich pasturage, besides abounding in poison plants.'

'I never set foot in Western Australia, Mr. Kirwan,' answered O'Grady, with the studiously cold manner

which he adopted when offended, 'therefore am unable to say. I lived principally in the colonies of New South Wales and Victoria, which on reference to any map you will find are distant some thousands of miles from the one you mention.'

'Indeed!' said Kirwan, 'thank you; but one supposes that all these outlandish places are much alike or near together. It don't much matter—that I know of.'

'Nor does it,' retorted O'Grady; 'if you called the Isle of Wight, the Isle of Skye, and confused the West Highlands with M'Gillicuddy's Reeks, a Frenchman wouldn't probably detect the error, but the one piece of ignorance would be even less absurd than the other.'

'Come, Maurice,' said I, 'let us have a look at the cattle; you know we promised to take the ladies after lunch to see the pound wall jumped. Come along.'

Bearing him away from the neighbourhood of Mr. Kirwan, further parley with whom, I plainly foresaw, might have rendered a reference to the 'saw-handle' by no means an impossible contingency, we walked over into the thick of the fair to have a good look at the humours and peculiarities of that ancient institution. Droves of cattle, chiefly adapted for fattening, were kept in order by agile herdsmen and dogs of extraordinary intelligence, who prevented admixture with others in a wonderful manner. These droves, though collectively large, were small separately, and lacked the exciting concomitants of mounted attendance and the matchless horsemanship which a concourse of stock-riders affords. The herdsmen, in this instance, seemed almost as tame as the shepherds, who, in charge of the eighty thousand sheep, were quite a small army.

'Well, Maurice,' said I, 'the flocks here don't average two or three thousand as they do in the salt-bush

plains; but they are a fine, well-grown lot, chiefly long-wools, with Leicester and Lincoln crosses.'

'The little mountain sheep, the true original stock of the county, are not bigger than the merinos,' said he, 'but the wool, though soft, is coarser. Still, they make delicious mutton. Most of the gentry, though they breed Leicesters and Down sheep for sale, much as they do in England, keep a small flock of these little mountaineers for choice mutton.'

'The cattle seem very well-bred,' said I; 'most of the stores are Shorthorn, Devon, and Hereford crosses. What are they worth?'

'Don't faint when I tell you—£12 to £15 a head. What do you think of that for store cattle, my boy? However, they pay well. Most of them are half fat, and top up quickly. I'm going to buy about five hundred for my place, as I am striving to make a decent stock-farm down in Galway.'

Here a hearty laugh caused us to turn round, while a jolly voice, which proceeded from a cheerful, keen-eyed personage with an auburn beard, accosted Maurice.

'What, O'Grady buying away as usual? You are not thinking of taking the whole lot, are you? I want a few, while poor Kirwan has seen every drove in the fair, and hasn't made up his mind which particular fifty he intends to buy.'

'How do you do, Lord Blount?' said Maurice cordially. 'Allow me to introduce an Australian friend of mine, just come home to look about him—Mr. Boldrewood.'

'Great pleasure in making his acquaintance,' said the peer, 'or that of any Australian gentleman. Mr. Woodlands of Victoria gave me an uncommonly fair cheque for some shorthorns of my own breeding last year. Do you happen to have met him?'

'Rawdon Woodlands is an intimate friend of mine,' said I, 'and, as I chance to know, sold a yearling calf for four hundred guineas just before I left. He has made, apparently, a fair investment.'

'Well, he was a good fellow,' affirmed his lordship, 'and a good judge. Sold him some very nice cattle, though perhaps I shouldn't say it.'

'Why didn't you come out to Australia and rule over us, and breed shorthorns too, when you had the chance?' said Maurice. 'It was the greatest murder in the world that you declined. You'd have delighted in Australia, and suited the country down to the ground.'

'I have always regretted,' said Lord Blount, 'that I did not go out to Victoria when I had the offer of the Governorship last year, but certain reasons weighed with me at the time. Some confounded fellow, besides, gave a horrid description of the "manners and customs." I've since found out that it was all lies. However, that's past. Shall we look at the hunters? The Roscommon men ought to have some decent stone-wall performers on view.'

We were soon in the thick of the horse exhibition, which was indeed worth seeing. In no part of the United Kingdom is hunting more passionately loved, more eagerly followed, than in Ireland. And in the West particularly are most of the daring deeds of horsemanship performed which have found chroniclers.

The country, though broken and occasionally precipitous, contains much comparatively level ground. The enclosures, chiefly effected by dry-stone walls, are particularly adapted for a hunting country. They are not uniformly high, and though necessitating a good jump to clear them, are occasionally lowered a foot or so, sometimes by the brunt of a horse, by decay, or more direct human agency.

No lover of horses could have looked without admiration upon the assemblage of hunters brought for sale to this time-honoured rendezvous. Galway, Roscommon, Mayo, and Clare contributed each their proportion of magnificent horses—fast, clever, up to weight, and apparently ready, as far as activity went, to jump on to the roof of a house or a bridge wall and off again.

Bred from blood horses of the highest caste, of which Ireland has always secured her full proportion, and from the wiry, well-bred country mares, there were many grand animals among them. The Irish hunter is probably the best and safest in the world. In colthood he follows his dam in and out of many a gap in the stone walls which limit nominally his pastures. Fences in Ireland are generally a trifle out of repair, and stone walls are no exception. Thus he has early 'schooling,' and learns to go 'in and out clever,' through these graduated exercise lessons; by practice he comes to touch lightly with his hind feet, as does the goat and the deer. Thus, when properly bitted and trained, small wonder if he becomes, as he is admitted to be, the best and safest jumper, for height, in the Old World.

Mark you, I do not say for the New. In that other England which is growing up in the South, where all the national sports are deeply rooted, the hunters and steeplechase horses are accustomed to go best pace over a monotonous succession of high timber fences, the unyielding, massive top-rails of which will send a horse down, as if shot, on to ground nearly as hard as a turnpike road.

Australian rail fences average in height from four feet to four feet six inches, occasionally rising to five feet, and our hunting country is rarely relieved by

hedge or ditch or even stone walls. There is no relief, no modification. Many a time have I seen a large field ride these uncompromising obstacles as straight as birds, with the Melbourne hounds; seen the heavy brigade and the raw recruits alike sail on, halting for nothing, and caring for nothing, while fast and fearless ever, well to the front, rode the 'lady in grey.' I was not therefore likely to be demoralised by stone walls or wide ditches, were they historical and traditional twice over.

At this moment a sudden commotion in the crowd, a hoarse murmur, denoted that something more than ordinary was in progress or contemplation.

'What is it?' said I to a small farmer who was near me. 'What's the row about?'

''Tis Ned Athy, who is going to lep the pound wall—no less—with that brown mare of his, Corrib they call her.'

'Will he do it?' said I.

'Faix, your honour, I'm dubersome; she's a great baste entirely, but there's no one done it this year—and the last horse that tried it broke his neck.'

I must bring up the ladies, thought I; this is a sensational affair,—neck or nothing, evidently,—in any case the sight is worth something. I dashed off, having seen most of what I wanted to see, and being unwilling that the ladies should be baulked of their share. I found the carriage, having descried the distinguished Maurice in close attendance, making love to Harriet Blake, or quarrelling with her, which, after all, perhaps only means a different phase of the same thing.

'Come over and see the big jump done,' said I; 'you can drive close up to the pound. They tell me a Mr. Ned Athy is going to ride his horse over the wall.'

'Over the pound wall!' said Isidora, her eyes shining with lambent fire; 'let us go over at once, papa, it will be something worth looking at.'

As she spoke, I recalled descriptions of earlier sensational feats, when shield and buckler rang to the stern sword-play in the arena of the Coliseum; where bright blades grew crimson, many and stalwart forms drooped, sinking on the thirsty sand. While fair, proud, patrician faces gazed calmly on the games in which the counters were men's lives—in which a slow parry, or a clumsy feint, was fatal; in which the prize was honour to the limits of the far Roman sway, and the forfeit, death.

'I hate this part of the custom of the fair,' said Harriet Blake abruptly. 'It's too dangerous. Last year Gerald Ffont broke his horse's neck, and narrowly escaped with his own.'

'Pooh, pooh, nonsense!' said Dillon Blake; 'Harriet talks as if every Galway man hadn't a spare neck in his pocket; why shouldn't he break his neck, or make a fair offer at it now and then, for sport, and all the best blood in the land looking on, with the ladies to boot? Men are cheap in ould Ireland anyhow, and a young fellow more or less, what matter? Here he comes. Sure the mare's in great heart to-day—look at her.'

As he spoke, the crowd opened and made way for a horse and rider. I looked eagerly at the pair.

The horseman who was the object of so much interest and anxiety was a tall young man, turned out in becoming hunting costume, and sitting his horse with the easy grace of a practised steeple-chase rider, as I could gather he was, from the numerous comments which greeted his appearance.

'Sure he won the "Blazer's Cup" last year,' said a stout farmer to a cherry-cheeked damsel, who stood

beside him gazing with all her eyes at the hero of the hour, 'and I seen him fly the big ditch and the gripe, where Teddy the Tyler broke his neck, and Frank Lynch was taken up for dead. It's a murder the mare isn't entered at Punchestown this year.'

'The bigger the lep, the better luck for Mr. Ned,' said another frieze-coated yeoman; 'ould Sam Conner backed him, and won a nate handful of notes the same day; for, says he, "They may all break their necks, but ye may sware Ned will have the brown mare out and away by some manes or another"—and he did, more by token—she has always a leg to spare, the same Corrib—the heavens be her bed. See now!'

As this pious aspiration was uttered and fervently echoed by the blooming country girl aforesaid, the hope of the county rode slowly into the old-fashioned enclosure for the strayed stock of the period, and advanced to the old but massive wall which, rudely constructed of rough stone, interposed between him and the eager crowd.

He did not stop until the chest of the well-bred, high-couraged animal that he bestrode almost touched the lower portion of it.

He reined up her head until her tan muzzle rested on the coping. Patting her glossy neck, he retreated a few paces, and then at half speed faced her at the tremendous jump. As she neared the wall, she pulled slightly, and shook her resolute head, then measuring her distance with wonderful accuracy, sprang upward with one stag-like bound, just touching with a hind foot as she alighted amid the cheers of the great multitude. Each man, woman, and child shouted until the welkin rang again. The female portion waved their handkerchiefs, and well-nigh sobbed with excitement and triumph; while the men pressed around, shook the

rider by the hand, and patted the horse's arching neck. So great was the crush, that, had the mare's temper been less perfect, the affair might have terminated with an additional sensation.

'Well, Boldrewood, my boy,' said Dillon Blake, 'can your horses jump like that in Australia? Not but what you have good blood there, I know; but finer horse and rider never faced a fence than the pair yonder this day.'

'It was a splendid feat,' said I heartily, 'worth coming all the way to Galway to see; nothing could well be finer. I particularly admired the cool, workmanlike way in which the thing was done. But——'

'Now, no buts, Mr. Boldrewood,' said Miss Kate Ffrench. 'Sure you're not going to tell us that any one in Australia could take a fence a foot higher, or ride it more beautifully than Ned Athy; I feel as if I could kiss him, and Corrib too; isn't she the darling of the world? I wish papa would buy her.'

'I am not going to make any wonderful statements, Miss Ffrench, about Australian horses, or men either; their deeds must speak for themselves. Only some leaps taken over stiff timber, in that barbarous country, would not suffer in comparison with what we have seen to-day, eh, Maurice?'

'We have seen a few things there, Master Rolf,' said that eminent colonist decisively, 'hunting and fencing included; but it's no use telling the natives here, they wouldn't believe ye. They think the whole habitable world is bounded on three sides by Ireland, and on the fourth by Galway.'

'I consider that a very rude speech, Mr. O'Grady,' said Kate Ffrench indignantly; 'whom do you dare to call natives, and why do you think we fancy ourselves all the world?'

'Were you not born in Galway, me dear Miss Kate?' asked O'Grady, in the mildest voice.

'Of course I was; you know that.'

'Well then, you are a native of Galway, and you cannot feel insulted by any reference chiefly complimentary to your "native isle."'

'See here now,' interpolated Blake, 'it's raining just as steadily as ever, and, to my fancy, it's a trifle cooler than it was. Let us all go home in the name of St. Swithin, and Maurice here, and Kate, Harriet, and the rest of ye, can quarrel over the library fire till the dressing-bell rings.'

'Are we all feeling so warlike, papa?' said Isidora, turning her eyes dreamily in my direction. 'But your advice is very sound about the rain. I don't see why we should continue to compete with those country girls, in these Connemara cloaks, as if to see which could catch cold first.'

This decided us. We left the squirearchy to defy the elements, with the aid of a profuse exhibition of hot whisky and water; left the steaming cattle, the soaked sheep, and the saturated soil, to mutual adaptation, and hied us home to the sure comforts and glowing fire-sides of Mount Blake. There, with the help of billiards, talk, and recriminative warfare incessantly carried on between Harriet and O'Grady, we managed to pass the hours till the dressing-bell sounded.

As we sat down to dinner, Mr. Kirwan was announced. The prevailing expression was by no means of a joyous character, but Blake was as usual most profusely hospitable.

'Take Mr. Kirwan to the blue-room, Murtagh, and tell him we'll give him ten minutes' law, after that, with my compliments, he must take his dinner as Providence sends it. I won't be responsible for

another minute. Will ye remember that, Murtagh, ye old villain?'

'Divil a bit of me but disremembers already. Sure I'll tell him to dthress quickly, or your honour and the dinner will be ruinated.'

'I see the hounds meet at Garomhna to-morrow,' said Jack Ffrench, 'and they say there will be riding if we have luck. There are some English strangers at the barracks, and they've brought their horses.'

'Why couldn't they pick a decenter line of county?' said O'Grady. 'I'm not particular myself; I have risked my neck a good deal in my time, but I see no fun in a broken, blind country like Garomhna, and such fences and man-traps in all directions.'

'You have lost your nerve galloping about in the sandy desert—in what's the name of your colony, O'Grady?' said Mr. Kirwan. 'We Galway people are not so careful, you see.'

'By the Cross of Cong, the Hen's Castle, and all the traditional humbugs of this over-stocked dairy-farm that you call Galway,' retorted Maurice, 'I wish you could see an Australian boy ride through a pine scrub, or down a range after a bullock with an indistinct brand on. You would see what *real* riding was like. And, may be, you wouldn't be so proud of going a fair pace over a country with never a tree in it, only a crumbling wall and a creek to jump now and then.'

CHAPTER XXIV

MR. KIRWAN listened calmly to Maurice's impetuous defence of the colonies, but vouchsafed little reply, save

what was conveyed by an incredulous raising of the eyebrows.

'Mr. Boldrewood will have an opportunity of riding the country to-morrow that you think so little of,' he answered slowly, 'and then——'

'And then,' pursued the Rupert of debate, 'you will see mighty little of the way he goes, if you and he ride as I have seen both of you many a time.'

'Come, Mr. O'Grady,' said Harriet Blake, with suspicious amiability, 'don't you think it is a little inhospitable for you and Mr. Kirwan to make a *cheval de bataille* of Mr. Boldrewood? I daresay he'd rather ride a steeple-chase than talk about it any day.'

'True enough, but I've seen him ride many a one, and I can't help standing up against superior provincials. I suppose we may hope to see some of you ladies to-morrow?'

'If the day is not very wet, you may be sure you will. Mr. Boldrewood's horses, and Mr. Boldrewood's riding, and that very neat groom of his, have excited ever so much interest and curiosity in these simple regions. So we'll all come. What do you say, Isidora?'

'Oh, by all means. We haven't seen the face of a stranger for months, till the other day; so we'll turn out in force to do him honour, and if anything happens to him papa must lay informations against you and Mr. Kirwan and Kate Ffrench.'

'If I had known Miss Blake took such a deep interest in Mr. Boldrewood, we might have been more careful,' said Mr. Kirwan, with an attempt at sarcasm; 'but——'

'But Mr. Boldrewood is quite capable of taking care of himself,' I interrupted, rather quickly; 'and in his country the riding, if there is any to be done, generally precedes the talking. Do you think the Ministry will

carry their Ecclesiastical Bill, or are the Conservatives to have a majority?'

'If they understood the feeling of the loyal propertied classes in Ireland, they might carry that and every other Bill they chose to bring in,' said Kirwan, accepting my lead with a distinct effort; 'as it is, the very people they're trying to conciliate will join their opponents and outvote them.'

'There would seem to be endless difficulty in comprehending anything social or political in this most enigmatical land,' said I. 'Why, I cannot for the life of me discover. Are you sure you understand yourselves?'

'You are quite right, my dear fellow,' answered O'Grady; 'there's no earthly reason why there should be any more time lost in settling Irish affairs than those of other people. But they have been so long used to be wondered at, that they're proud of it. If I had my will, I'd draft all the delegates, home-rulers, and other wind-bags, with about one-half of the breeding herd,—I beg pardon, I mean the general population,—and pop them down in the middle of Australia, with a year's rations, and a trifle of maize for seed, and the divil a potato or a drop of whisky.'

'And Mr. Maurice O'Grady as Dr. Francia and permanent Dictator,' retorted the justly incensed Kirwan. 'I can imagine how refined and prosperous a community would result.'

'God forbid!' piteously ejaculated O'Grady, with an air of such deep deprecation that we all laughed. 'A new run in a dry season, with store cattle, the blacks bad, and your horses knocked up, would be a pleasant party compared to it. But I'd lay a wager that in fifty years the deported people would build up a nation, strong, safe, and reasonable, each individual as superior to the home-reared inhabitants as the

American farmer, who builds, and sails, and freights his own ship, is to the average English peasant.'

'See here now, O'Grady,' struck in Blake, 'if you're going to stand for the county at the General Election, command me and my votes to a man, but don't practise on us before our time comes; a fine flow of eloquence ye have, bedad! "A new world, which would redress the wrongs of the old." Was it Burke who said something like that? 'Tis a mighty quare world, old or new, that would take a contract for redressing the wrongs of Ireland. Sure, we couldn't tamely stand by and suffer them to be redressed, even if we knew what they were, which we don't.'

Dinner concluded, and the ladies departed, thus Mr. Blake: 'We'll have a cup of coffee in the drawing-room after all this intellectual enjoyment, but, first of all, suppose we take a look at the stables. My father —rest his sowl—in the hunting season went there straight from the dinner-table,—they dined a trifle earlier in those days,—and from the stables to his bed. We won't follow his example altogether, but maybe Boldrewood would like to see his groom and give his orders for the morning.'

'You have anticipated me, my dear sir,' I returned. 'I was just about to ask permission to have Master Jim summoned, but I prefer actual inspection.'

'Good grooms are always hard to get,' drawled Mr. Kirwan; 'I suppose you found it so. Of course, the English style of stable management would seem strange to you at first.'

'My fellow is decently up in his work,' said I, winking at O'Grady. 'As to stable management, that is much the same among Englishmen—with due deference to your opinion—all over the world.'

Here we entered a stone-paved passage, at the outer

end of which the appearance of lights, and the sound of voices mirthfully raised, indicated the servants' hall.

'By the powers,' said old Dillon, 'that fellow of yours keeps them all alive. He is an amusing rascal, they tell me, though he looks so very quiet. May I never, if he isn't singing this minute. Suppose we go and have the benefit of it.'

We drew near the entrance, and I, partly opening the massive door, disclosed a numerous and cheerful company of the men-servants and maids of the household, listening with respectful admiration to Jim, who had, after much solicitation, struck up a song of his native land.

'Sure, Mr. Whitby, you wouldn't be afther refusing to sing to us agin, and Mr. Maguire lading off so iligantly with the "Colleen Rhue"; sure, ye promised *me*, and maybe I'd sing ye "Savourna Dheelish" afterwards.'

Thus adjured by the housemaid, Kitty Doolan, an exceedingly pretty girl, Mr. Whitby, who looked very comfortable seated on the right of the coachman, near the head of a long table, and within the influence of a glowing turf fire, took a sip of his glass of hot whisky and water, and, looking tenderly at Kitty, declared he couldn't refuse her anything, and essayed to commence.

'But I must first tell you,' said he, 'that the song is all about wild cattle and camping out in the bush—or the woods, as you would call it. Our young native fellows go out sometimes for weeks together, hunting up their masters' cattle, and sometimes (here Jim looked highly moral), I'm sorry to say, after cattle that don't belong to them or their masters either.'

'Sure, and what harm if they did?' said a stalwart keeper; 'isn't the country full of 'em, you were tellin' me, all the same as the deer and the game with us?'

'So it is, in a manner of speaking,' said Jim cautiously; 'but most of 'em are branded, and you

wouldn't believe it how particular the owners are about people helping themselves. If they're caught even with the hide of another man's beast, it's the jail for a year or two, maybe four or five.'

'D'ye tell me that now?' said the coachman, a corpulent personage, with a neat tie, as became his position; 'isn't it a free country? but there's tyrants everywhere, as well as in poor ould Erin.'

Here he heaved a ponderous sigh, and relapsed into dignified silence.

'Maybe ye'd rather not sing,' pouted Miss Kitty; whereupon Jim, prefacing that he 'picked it up from a Murrumbidgee feller, one long night, in the mail between Hay and Booligal,' remarked: 'Chorus, gentlemen and ladies. Air, "A wet sheet and a flowing sea,"' and then struck up:—

THE MUSTER SONG

1

A bright sun and a loosened rein,
While the stock-whip's pealing sound
Rings out amid the forest trees
As merrily forth we bound.
As merrily forth we bound, my boys,
While with the deer's free flight
Sweeps tireless on, the stock-horse true,
From morn to starry night.

Chorus.

From morn to starry night, my boys,
From morn to starry night;
Sweeps tireless on, the stock-horse true,
From morn to starry night.

2

'Oh, for a tame and gentle herd,'
I hear some crawler cry;
But give to me the mountain bull,
With a glare in his tameless eye.

With a glare in his tameless eye, my boys,
As down the rugged tier
Dash the fierce children of the waste
And the steed that mocks at fear.

Chorus.

And the steed that mocks at fear, my boys,
And the steed that mocks at fear;
Dash the fierce children of the waste
And the steed that mocks at fear.

3

There's danger in that hoop-horned dun,
And mischief in yon cow;
And—jump, my merry, merry horsemen all,
The wild mob's bolted now.
The wild mob's bolted now, my boys,
But it ne'er was in their hides
To show the way to the well-tried nags
That are rattling by their sides.

Chorus.

That are rattling by their sides, my boys,
That are rattling by their sides;
To show the way to the well-tried nags
That are rattling by their sides.

4

Oh, 'tis joy to track the roving herd
Through the long, long summer day;
To camp beside the lonely creek
When dims the golden ray;
When the dawn-bird cries from the aged trees,
On the fresh green trail to speed,
For the saddle was our childhood's home,
And our heritage the steed.

Chorus.

Our heritage the steed, my boys,
Our heritage the steed;
The saddle was our childhood's home,
And our heritage the steed.

'A mellow voice FitzEustace had'—that is, Master Jim sang very fairly, with fresh clear tones, rather in advance of his musical instruction. However, the applause which he received, especially from the female portion of the company, might have satisfied a more exacting vocalist.

'Oh, Mr. Whitby,' said Kitty, 'what a beautiful country yours must be to live in,—nearly always summer, as the poetry says,—not like this rainy part.'

'Wouldn't ye like to thry the climate, Miss Kitty?' said the old coachman maliciously. 'Sure, Jim would take ye there when he's going, and send ye back safe if the counthry didn't agree with ye.'

'Mr. Whitby wouldn't be troubled with me,' said Kitty, tossing her head, and looking coquettishly at that young person. 'But there—yes, it is the mistress' bell. Good-night, all.'

'Well done, Jim,' said O'Grady, as we all walked in; 'you can sing a good song, and stand up for your country in more ways than one. There's the true ring of bush life about it, and that last verse is pretty close to nature. Many a time have I waked up under a gum tree and seen the stars just paling in the sky, feeling as fresh as a schoolboy—always supposing the horses weren't lost.'

'Mustering ain't bad fun, sir,' answered Jim, 'as long as you're not keeping a gate, with an old cow coming straight for the small of your back, and a young bull charging you in front. But you wanted to see the horses, sir,' turning quietly to me.

'Yes,' I said, 'the hounds meet at Garomhna tomorrow. Is the Pirate pretty fit?'

'Fit to go for a man's life, sir,' answered Jim with decision. 'I've been hard set to give the horses exercise this damp weather. But they've had it

somehow, and I think you won't find many places, except the top of the parish church, that they won't carry you over, sir.'

'Well, he will have to go his best, from what I hear, to-morrow; so look them over carefully, and put the muzzles on early.'

. . . . .

The eventful morning broke, and, without such an entire and unnatural absence of clouds as would have been injurious to the scent, it was the nearest approach to a fine day that had occurred for weeks. The air, though moist, was soft and mild, the clouds higher and less dense, while the sun actually permitted portions of his enlivening countenance to be visible to mortal eye.

Every one's spirits rose. Anticipations of successful sport were rife—men, horses, helpers, visitors unattached, ladies and ladies' maids, all acknowledged the auspicious influence, while at breakfast-time a merrier company could hardly have been found, even in the land where mirth is always a cherished guest, and care as consistently shunned or defied.

I had, before leaving London, taken proper precautions as to boots, cords, and the correct hunting garb of the period. The metropolitan artists had contributed to my costume, and I consequently felt that indifference to criticism which a well-turned-out man or woman naturally assumes.

'By Jove, Boldrewood,' said O'Grady, as I entered, 'you'll destroy the country if you turn out in that fashion. Haven't you something less splendid? We're in the habit of appearing in a free and easy style here, and if you raise the standard we'll have to dress within an inch of our lives.'

'Why shouldn't Mr. Boldrewood turn out properly?'

asked Harriet Blake indignantly; 'I'm sure the way you and a few others dress is quite disgraceful. You don't like us to be dowdy; why then should you men affect to be slovenly? It's mere laziness.'

'Really,' answered O'Grady, with an expression of mock penitence, 'if we had thought our personal appearance was a matter of any importance to you young ladies, we should have been most happy to gratify you. But, before Boldrewood came, I never heard a remark on the subject.'

'We are all on his side this morning, I can assure you,' said Isidora, 'so you had better take the hint and cultivate *les petits soins* if it's in your nature.'

'Quite right,' said Dillon Blake, himself dressed with impartial adaptation to riding round his estate, walking through a turnip-field, or doing a little fishing if nothing better offered; 'keep 'em up to the mark, girls; nothing like it. I like to see young men careful about their get-up, either in the drawing-room or the hunting-field. However, Boldrewood mustn't fancy that he'll find no well-dressed men at the meet. There's that ex-aide-de-camp of Sir John Black's, Captain Wrapper, one of the best-looking, best-dressed, and best-paced men you can find with any hounds. Then we have the Master, our friend Kirwan, and a few others.'

'All very well, Mr. Blake,' said Kate Ffrench, 'but you can't deny that a great many young men look as if they were going badger-baiting or still-finding, or, indeed, anything but fox-hunting. But that's Ireland all over.'

'Ah, would ye now, Miss Ffrench, dear; and is it Miss Kate I hear making reflections upon her native land?' said Blake. 'Maybe England would suit ye better, or Australia, which is all the same, with a slight difference, Mr. Boldrewood tells us.'

'I am as fond of Ireland as any one can be,' said Miss Ffrench, always direct and outspoken; 'but I don't stand up for her follies and weaknesses. Where else can you find so many idle young men, not very well educated, and just able to live, spending half their time in hunting and shooting, and quite contented, as in this very county of ours?'

'Sure, it's their amiable nature and the warmth of their affections that won't permit them to lave their friends and the place they were born in. Ye must sympathise with that, Miss Kate.'

'I do nothing of the sort,' said the uncompromising damsel; 'why don't they go to India, or China, or America, or even Australia?' with a look of defiance at O'Grady and me, 'anywhere for work and a manly career.'

'Why, indeed?' said Maurice. 'Perhaps if you and Miss Harriet would state the case to them as forcibly as you have just done, they might be induced to emigrate. At present, however, they don't see it in that light, any more than the fishermen of "the Claddagh," and they are, I take it, the most stationary section of the population of the West.'

Here the grinding of carriage-wheels upon the gravel announced that the first act was over, and that the curtain was about to rise upon the legitimate drama, involving melodramatic or tragic action, as the gods might provide.

I was entrusted with a high phaeton and two tolerably fresh horses, with Mrs. Blake and Isidora; Miss Ffrench and Harriet Blake rode under O'Grady's escort—the former lady intending to follow the hounds, and the latter to see the throw-off to greater advantage than from any species of vehicle. Blake disposed his weight upon a cob of austere expression and consider-

able breadth of beam, while Jack Ffrench was mounted, like Father Fitz in the ballad, 'on a wiry weed.'

When we arrived, the neighbourhood was well represented, and, the fineness of the weather possibly operating favourably, there appeared to be, so Blake averred, an unusual proportion of carriages and young ladies.

'Take care of yourself, Boldrewood, me dear boy,' said Blake laughingly, 'it's partly in your honour, and for the sake of our friend Maurice here. You're in an awfully dangerous position. There's Rose O'Hara, and yonder sits Laura Vernon, the fair girl on the black horse. Bedad, ye'll never return to your native country.'

'All very well,' said I, 'I'm not vain enough to imagine that a stranger, with an unobtrusive stud of two horses, is likely to create much commotion in your country or any other. But why isn't O'Grady a captive by this time, if all you say is true?'

'Sure, he's a hardened divil—they've given him up, I believe. But here comes our Master. Sir Richard, allow me to introduce a friend of mine, Mr. Boldrewood, an Australian gentleman, who has come to see what Galway stone walls are like.'

'Much pleasure in meeting him,' said the Master, a handsome and distinguished-looking elderly man, superbly mounted. 'I presume those two very clever horses are yours, around which I saw a crowd just now. I thought the brown horse one of the finest animals I have seen for many a day. You must be careful he doesn't over-jump himself in our rugged country.'

'Thank you for the caution, Sir Richard,' I answered; 'I have fancied that he might come to grief that way myself; but he is quick on his legs, and I hope we shall pick up the needful experience as we go along.'

CHAPTER XXV

THE Master trotted off to the pack, now moving towards a wood, with oaks and elms very different in appearance from those which lay around Boldrewood Chase, where—

> Rolling as in sleep,
> Low thunders bring the mellow rain
> Which makes 'them' broad and deep.

Such atmospheric influences may have formerly affected these western forests, but the greed or poverty of man had long since denuded the greater portion of the landscape, until it was as bare as the Hebrides.

For all that, the view, in its own peculiar aspect, was grand and striking. An open stretch of country, 'grassy and bare, wide and wild, and open to the air,' too uneven for plains, too broken for downs, stony and seamed with watercourses, while ominous brown patches denoting the presence of bogs chequered the vivid green of the pastures. It resembled somewhat the Campagna of Rome, and, like it, was relieved by the purple shadows of hills and the overshadowing serenity of mountains.

At no great distance the bold projections and sheltered bays of the coast displayed themselves, while the waters of Loch Corrib lay calm and waveless under the rare gleams of the morning sun.

Having discovered Jim's whereabouts, partly by Sir Richard's hint as to the attendant crowd, I gave him instructions to keep within a reasonable distance, and proceeded to mount the Pirate. That celebrated

animal did not look quite so 'big' as when I saw him first, but had gained in muscle what he had lost in flesh. Under Jim's practised hands he had been brought as near to absolute 'concert pitch' in the way of training as was good for a hunter.

Ridden at exercise by a horseman as cool and sure of seat as was the Australian, he had by degrees dropped the nervous irritability which had given him so bad a character with previous owners. As he bent his neck to the rein, and stepped out freely, I thought myself equal to the exigencies of any hunting-field in Britain.

The hounds, under the guidance of an old frosty-faced huntsman, who looked as hard and wiry as if he had spent a lifetime in the saddle, betook themselves into the wood, which they soon made ring again with their tuneful throats.

Outside, the crowd of equestrians lounged and dawdled, occasionally riding quietly towards a point of special probability. Leisure was thus afforded for talk and observation. The neighbouring squires who were out showed by their well-stained coats the number of campaigns they had shared. The meet was enlivened by a sprinkling of ladies, among them a 'Baby Blake' or two, who showed by their easy seats and careless air that they intended to ride over more than the first fence. As for the hunters, a few fine animals were undoubtedly to be seen; but that the English dealers weeded them occasionally was apparent. Horses are comparatively cheap in Ireland, and the prices brought to bear upon the owner or breeder of an exceptionally clever hunter were too strong for provincial sentiment. So it came about, I was told, that in most instances they sold their best horses, and rode the unfashionable or mediocre ones.

Ned Athy, however, was an exception to this state of matters. He had often been offered a high price for the brown mare with the star, but had clung to her as yet with an Arab-like devotion. He was out to-day. As we ranged up together for a moment, I said, 'Can the mare gallop as well as jump, Mr. Athy?'

'She can do anything a horse can do,' said he, 'and if the fox breaks towards Dangan, you'll have an opportunity of seeing what Galway hunting is like. Your horse seems very fit; if he is as good as he looks, you ought to have given him a chance at Punchestown.'

'I think of going in for an English steeple-chase,' said I; 'one of them is enough for an amateur in a season.'

But at that moment a few notes, differing in tone from the somewhat discursive melody which we had occasionally heard from the wood, rang sharply out, a half-score of tuneful throats took up the variation, and then the full, glorious, maddening chorus swelled and reverberated through every ride and wood-path. We saw the historic Reynard slip quietly out of a nook, at no great distance, glide down a hedge and ditch which lay at an angle, turn by some sheep and a probable collie, look dangerously like returning, and then, prompted by our guardian angel, turn his head towards the distant hills, and stretch across the open with the elastic, swinging pace of an untried straight-goer. At that moment the leading hounds cleared the wood, and after a few questing circles settled ecstatically to the scent.

Is there in the world of sport, war, or adventure a more glorious sensation than such a scene affords? I have tasted somewhat of this earth's high-flavoured dainties, and I doubt it.

Everything is in favour of the hunting-field. The pleasant society, the regulated tone and manner, the perfection of the appointments, the training of the servants, the science of the sport itself, the sufficient admixture of danger, the high quality of the horses, all combine to produce a sport fit for kings, and impossible even for those potentates to produce in perfection out of Britain.

So thought I, as we swept away, well in front, the rank and file being on the other side of the wood. Sir Richard and old Larry the huntsman were on the right, about the same distance as we were on the left, of the pack. The Master crossed a low fence, and shot to the neighbourhood of the tail hounds; while old Larry settled himself in the saddle, put his cap firmly on his head, and evidently prepared himself for something out of the usual table of risks.

'Which way do you think the fox is heading, Larry?' said he.

'For Dangan,' said Larry; and, crossing himself devoutly, 'there'll be sore bones for some of us this night.'

The hounds were running now with a breast-high scent, mute almost, save for a quavering note from Resolute or Rapparee. There was consequently no opportunity for conversation, as we went best pace across the stony levels, taking the fences, or rather the walls, as Providence might send them; the 'hard men' of the late division, who had been a little thrown out at the start, coming well up in the rear, and awaiting an opportunity of getting to the front.

Ned Athy and I were no great distance apart, and I could not but admire the wonderful jumping powers of his mare, as well as the easy grace with which he sat the stag-like bounds which she took over every obstacle

in our path. Occasionally she used the wonderful gift, peculiar to Irish horses, of topping or touching lightly, like a chamois, the walls or banks as she crossed them. The pace was good, the leaps high and frequent. I began to entertain a conviction, if the fox didn't run to earth, or secure the services of some untoward saint, that we were in for a glorious run, affording a decisive test of the merits of our horses. I had as yet been more than satisfied with the way that the Pirate carried me. Going well within himself, he took the moderate leaps we had as yet encountered, in his stride.

A slight check occurring, which enabled the rear-guard to come up before old Larry hit off the scent again, made the field, if not so select, considerably more sociable and interesting. O'Grady, riding with all his old recklessness, and well mounted, was among them. Miss Kate Ffrench, Mr. Kirwan, the celebrated Miss Grace O'Mally, who, as O'Grady averred, 'went like a bird,' and would have made a name for herself in Australia, had she by good fortune emigrated to that favoured land; Jack Ffrench, on a young horse, whose manners he was cultivating, to the manifest risk and danger of his own neck — many heroes unnamed arrived, and it was evident that whatever victories were achieved that day would be duly observed of all men and chronicled.

After the second start, so to speak, I observed a difference in the country; the monotonous levels changed into a more hilly region, and consequently a greater expenditure of wind, on the part of the horses, became apparent. The Pirate was scarcely so much at home in the sudden declivities as the mare, but his high breeding and good form told—he never slackened stride, or yielded in any shape.

We had crossed a wall of greater height than usual,

with an indifferent 'take off' and a drop on the other side, which was far from reassuring, when I marked a sudden change in my companion's expression.

His eye brightened, and a half smile came over his face as we looked forward in the direction of the hounds. Following his gaze, I saw an enclosure of a different description from any we had hitherto encountered.

'What the deuce is that?' said I, pointing to the hounds, which, clustering for a moment, cast themselves down a declivity, then reappeared—again to disappear and repeat the performance. 'Is it the Great Wall of China, or the castle moat of Fin-ma-cool?'

The young fellow laughed as he said, 'Nothing so bad as all that, but many a man behind us would have as good a chance of jumping one as the other; it's an ox-fence that was put up by a Scotch proprietor who was going to show us all the way to make money in these parts. We don't often ride it, for the fox hardly ever takes the line he has done to-day. But if your horse hasn't had practice in banks and double ditches, I'd say pull up and don't risk his neck and your own.'

'Many thanks,' said I, 'but I have a rooted aversion to being stopped by bad country, bad weather, or anything short of total loss and defeat. So, if Pirate's education has been neglected, he must take a lesson.'

'And I'll give you one, if you don't mind,' said he. 'Watch Corrib, and you'll see the most elegant performer in all the West. There's few can touch her in topping a stone wall; but nothing in these parts can look at her in banks and doubles.'

We had been taking a pull during this conversation, and had now approached the ox-fence, which looked not less formidable on near acquaintance. First came a deep, broad ditch, then a tremendous bank, almost as

high and broad as a mud cabin; on the farther side of this truly undesirable arrangement was, according to my informant, another excavation.

'See here now,' said he, as he suddenly took his mare by the head and raced madly at the terrific jump.

Wondering if he had lost his reason, I lowered my hand, when the Pirate, taking the bit in his teeth, followed the mare's example, and, overtaking her, the excited animals, racing jealously, broke away, and as we were neither of us able to control our respective mounts 'a vision of sudden death' rose imminent.

'Pull him on to the bank, or he'll break his neck,' cried Athy in deep, earnest tones, as he pressed his hunting-cap firmly on his head and sent the mare at the leap. I felt the mighty dash of my horse's quarters as we left the ground and rose wildly to the desperate leap. I was able to mark the mare fly the first ditch, land lightly upon the enormous bank, and spring from that eminence over the next ditch, with the free grace and marvellous precision of the mountain deer.

Not so fortunate was the Pirate; his amazing propelling power and extraordinary stride sent him clean over the first ditch and the bank, high and broad as it was, but he had failed to realise the farther ditch. That unseen pitfall had nearly been our Moscow. But luckily the height of the bank necessitated so extended a flying leap that the good horse dropped clear of the farther side of the ditch—a stagger, a blunder (of that kind of which about two go to a fall), and we are off again across a stretch of marsh and rushy meadow.

'May I never see glory!' cried Athy impetuously, 'but that was the great lep, intirely. I've hunted here since I was a boy, and I never saw that fence taken in a fly before. He's a clever horse all round,

and I wouldn't say but he'd jump on to the bank next time if ye held him to it.'

'He must try it,' said I; 'for he'll never fly it the second time. It must be an awfully wide jump.'

'Five-and-twenty feet all out,' said Ned decisively; 'and now look at the next one.'

Having jumped into this delectable enclosure, which one could imagine a Scottish factor, soured with careless labourers and unfriendly neighbours, had erected in distinct defiance of the Blazers, we were naturally compelled to jump out again. Again we faced it together. But this time both horses were more temperate. Corrib deposited herself with undeviating precision upon the summit of the bank, where I, by a violent wrench, managed to land the Pirate, after which he half-scrambled, half-jumped with comparative ease over the second ditch.

'Well done, the Sassenach!' quoth my sympathetic comrade; 'for an English horse, he has a mighty tachable disposition. I'll go bail, before he's a month in Galway, he'll be as hard to take a fall out of as Corrib herself.'

'Thank you for the compliment,' I answered; 'we must force the pace now. The hounds are gaining on us.'

'True for you,' said he; 'and if the fox is heading for the Roman tower, there will be a brook or two and a river to cross.'

'What is the river like?' said I; 'is there a bridge or ford?'

'A ford, is it?' asked he laughingly; 'sure it's not the Shannon I'm talking of, but a wee dawshy bit of a stream that runs into the Suck. It's a small river, but a mighty big jump all the same.'

'Ha!' said I musingly; 'there are rivers and rivers; I ought to have known that.'

Here memory went back a good many years, and I saw myself again a careless, coinless, fearless youngster, riding up at midnight to a large herd of cattle, slumbering in their camp beside a broad, dry watercourse in a far-stretching plain, under the waning moon. My dear old friend, Fred Churbett, walks out to greet me from a faint, glimmering, camp fire. I had been tracking strayed horses since daylight.

'Well, Rolf, what luck?'

'All right; picked them up at the two-mile forest. What's the camp like for water?'

Fred looks contemptuously at the jagged, dusty fissure, popularly believed to be a stream, and thus delivers himself—

'They call this the *Little River*, and well they may; it's the smallest bloomin' river I ever saw in *my* life. Hard work to get water enough to make tea with to-night.'

His position was sound. There could hardly be a river of smaller dimensions as to water storage in summer, although in winter more than one incautious encampment reposing in its grassy bed had been washed away—teams, drays, and goods—by a sudden resistless flood.

This Galway watercourse was one of those swift, clear streams, not larger than a brook, which runs strong throughout the year between its willowy banks, and by local usage and tradition bears the rank of river.

I was not sorry that we should have water-jumps introduced into the day's work, as I fancied that the disadvantage under which I had suffered during the earlier part of the day would now be transferred to the natives. The Irish horse is the best leaper for height in Europe, but the size and 'scope' of the English

hunter gives him an advantage in deep meadow and water-jumps.

'If I don't mistake,' said I, 'the hounds are doubling, and we shall meet them near that ruin.'

'You are right there; and there's that old villain Larry, the Master, and I don't know how many we left behind, making for it too. I believe Larry knows every fox in the country, and the time he'll take the moment he claps an eye on him.'

'It will be all the pleasanter,' said I, 'if we have more company at the finish. I think I see a habit in the front.'

'That's Grace O'Malley; the deuce a bit she'd care if she had been with us at the ox-fence. If she's mounted on Leprechaun to-day, she has as good a chance of the brush as any one.'

'How about Sir Richard?' I asked.

'Sir Dunstan hasn't his fellow in the county,' he answered; 'and the Master, more power to him, is mighty hard to beat. But they're both years older than they used to be.'

We steadied the pace, and as predicted, the fox turned and made for the old tower, which, the work of a perished race, its very use and origin unknown, stood time-worn and solemn by the bank of a streamlet. Some instinct of concealment had stirred the brain of the flagging quarry when he made for the massive blocks which lay piled around its base; but the fatal pack was hard upon his trail, and without a second attempt he breasted the brook and headed across the marshy meadows for a distant hill.

The forces converged at this point, and as my horse, going more at its ease, permitted a little observation, I had leisure for a converse.

'Hope you have had no misadventure?' said Mr.

Kirwan, in his cool measured tones. 'I made sure you had been thrown out from want of knowledge of the country.'

'Arrah! tache your grandmother,' broke in O'Grady, who sailed up, riding in his usual careless fashion, but to whose horse, up to three stone over his weight, a few liberties did not signify. 'What's knowledge of the country to a man that's ridden for weeks where there's never been a white man before? Ye might as well give him a compass to go through Phœnix Park with! But how did you get over the ox-fence, Rolf? They are a trifle rough on you Sassenachs.'

'Got over without a fall,' I answered carelessly. 'Where are the other ladies?'

'Gone back with Jack Blake and the rearguard,' said O'Grady. 'They pulled up when the hounds took this line, all excepting Miss Grace here. But she inherits the disposition of her father, the Major of the 77th, of whom the song says—

"My father cared neither for shot nor shell,
He laughed at death and dangers;
And he'd storm the very gates of h—l
With a company of Rangers."

CHAPTER XXVI

'SEE her setting her horse going at the brook now!'

We were near enough to that stream to be thinking of the same exertion, so we took hold of our horses, picked our lines and went at it. It was deep, not particularly wide, but with marshy borders and an indifferent take-off. Our fair companion cleared it easily,

almost side by side with the Master, who had probably directed her to a good place, near an old pollard willow. O'Grady and Kirwan got over respectably but no more. As I took the Pirate at it I roused him a little, and he flew the whole thing with what seemed a mere extension of stride. I thought Corrib jumped a trifle short, and faced it with less eagerness than the walls and banks of the earlier part of the run.

The ground now became heavier, the fields larger, and only an occasional wall or brook crossed our path. The pace was better than ever, and the length and severity of the chase began to tell upon horse, hound, and fox.

'D'ye see that hill?' said the huntsman, as he dropped close by me over a loose stone wall; 'it's at the foot of it the river runs. If the fox crosses there, there's earths that hasn't been stopped, and we shall go home without a kill.'

'Surely the hounds will run into him before that,' said I.

''Tis myself doubts it,' quoth Larry; 'he's a powerful dog fox—more be token I knew him two years since, with the white tip to his brush; he killed a pea-hen for me, bad cess to him!'

The comparatively level country, after a long and by no means light-going run, now commenced to give the hounds somewhat the best of it. The pace was awfully good. We were sure, as things looked, to have to ride the river, for Reynard, a long-legged, tireless mountain fox, seemed to have gathered fresh wind and courage from the view of his favourite point.

We still preserved our respective positions. The Master and the fair Grace, with a few of the better-mounted *habitués*, were on the right, well up; O'Grady and Kirwan nearer to us on the left.

As we approached the river, which we could trace by an occasional straggling tree, the ground became deeper and more holding, which was not without its effect upon the already select division. Confident in the blood and condition of the Pirate, I began to hope that even yet I might ride in the front of a Galway field, the perils of a strange country notwithstanding. At that moment old Larry viewed the fox, and with a view-hollo that roused the echoes in the far mountain, and bore hard upon the tympanum of the nearest horseman, he shook together his high-couraged but failing nag.

The bristles of the leading hounds rose, as Resolute and Reckless, with a score of maddening comrades, raced mute and ruthless at the turn in the stream, whither the dragging limbs of the doomed animal were bearing him, as if they were bent on drinking his blood before he touched water.

Now came the struggle for pride of place. The Master, on St. Dunstan, still sailed steadily forward as though ready to hunt till sunset. The 'ladye fayre' and her hunter, fleeter and of higher lineage than ever carried the bride of knight-errant in old romance, held gallantly on.

For the first time I called upon the Pirate, and gallantly that much-maligned steed answered to the steel. Shaking his head, he put on a spurt which necessitated the best efforts of my companions to challenge. Corrib raced up alongside, but I could see that it was only by muscular exertion that she held her own. Kirwan and O'Grady rode side by side, and seemed disposed to take the great leap of the day, which now lay before us, in more collected fashion. Cool as I seemed, I was now possessed by the desperate determination, the delirious recklessness, which I

had often felt in Australia—felt when the scrub cattle or the mountain mustangs were approaching the yard; when the labour of days, and the expected possession of the half-wild animals, were to be realised or hopelessly lost. Then, stranger from the far home-land, is the time to see the men of the New World ride! Through tangled brush, o'er mountain steep and scarped, as though life and limb of man or horse were idle words; watch the horse and rider, in absolute demoniac possession, like the wild huntsman of the German legend, sweep stormily, resistless on.

Something akin to the long-pent passion of old days seemed to thrill each vein as the chase approached its finale. Whatever was in the Pirate must come out now. I sat down upon him, and confident upon his staying power and ability to jump water, for which, indeed, he had established his only favourable reputation 'in the grass country,' where he had performed during his first season, I rode straight for the foaming river. The hounds were close upon the fox, and indeed well-nigh mouthed him as he flung himself into the swift waters.

In one mass they followed, and were soon flecking the brown water with their spotted bodies; on the left I rode with comparative ease in the lead; Corrib was doing her best, with all the aid which consummate skill could give her. O'Grady and Kirwan were riding with the jealousy of mortal foes. The hounds had been turning for the last mile towards the main army, in the front of which Sir Richard, Miss O'Malley, and old Larry rode without 'prevarication' of any sort, over walls, ditches, rails, or drains. They had, therefore, a certain advantage in case the fox, after crossing, should hug the bank and take his course down stream. As I neared the river, which I could now see foaming and

flashing beneath uneven grassy banks, I saw my only chance for a lead, and took my point.

I noted a steadying of pace on the part of the contingent on the right. I saw the fox crawl up the farther bank. Weary and draggled he turned down stream. Giving the Pirate the first refresher he had felt since the start, I roused him with voice and spur, and sent him at racing speed straight at the broken water.

Shaking his head, and with an angry snort, he rose gallantly from the sound though rather high bank, and soaring over the flashing tide, dropped lightly far on the other side. Half turning in my saddle, as I wrenched his head round and caused him to wheel towards that doomed quarry like a stock-horse on 'camp' duty, I heard Ned Athy's Galway shout; I saw Corrib make a desperate effort, but her bolt was shot; she jumped short, dropping her hind legs into the river, and rolled over. Kirwan's horse baulked, giving his pretentious owner an involuntary douche, while O'Grady, hopeless of clearing the jump, forced his beaten horse into the stream, and swam calmly down to a shelving cape.

The day was done. Before I had ridden fifty yards, Resolute cast himself, all teeth and bristles, upon the reeling gallicide, while Rapparee and a score of front-rankers made it difficult for me to rescue the indispensable trophy.

Sir Richard, seeing how things were going, had slightly swerved, under Larry's guidance, to where a narrower channel gave Miss O'Malley a reasonable place to negotiate.

As I presented the brush of the ill-fated scion of a race of straight-goers to Miss O'Malley, her frank, dark blue eyes rested upon me for a moment with a look half-serious, half-mirthful, as she said—

'You're the first Englishman that ever had the chance of paying me *this* compliment in my own county; and I won't say that I ever saw one more fairly won,' she graciously added, as I fastened the trophy to the pommel of her side-saddle.

'You may say that with your own pretty mouth, Grace!' said the Master. 'I hope we're not ashamed to be cut out by a stranger now and then. It doesn't happen often; and if I'd thought Leprechaun had been safe for the river, I'd have given you a race for it, old as I am, Mr. Boldrewood.'

'I feel a double obligation to Miss O'Malley,' said I, as I looked at St. Dunstan's flanks, the slight motion of which showed how little the severe run had told on him.

Not in Galway was I likely to be looked upon coldly for an accidental bit of good fortune like the present. On all sides, good wishes and congratulations were showered upon me, mixed with commendation of the now popular Pirate. Introductions were requested on all sides, and invitations followed of so comprehensive a character that my return to Australia would have been indefinitely postponed had I accepted half of them.

'I knew it was all up with us,' said O'Grady, 'when I saw him set his teeth in that way he has, and go at the creek (beg the county's pardon, 'tis the river I mean) the minute he saw the fox turn. Didn't I see him jump the Warrenbyne, on old Hassan, after a mob of wild horses, and it all broken rocks, at a bigger place than this?'

'Come, Maurice,' I interrupted, 'spare my blushes. I shall retaliate if you make me the hero of any more romances. You have no notion what a bagful of stories I could let loose about *you*.'

tireless and enthusiastic, after snipe or wildfowl, for the most trifling remuneration. They seemed to expend their enthusiasm in all conceivable directions but in that of work. Whether they despaired of any profitable result to themselves from that species of bodily exercise, whether it was foreign to the national genius and so needed artificial stimulation, or whether the climate, the landlords, the priests, and the potatoes combined in some potent league for its discouragement, the fact was undeniable. The ruinous hovels, the neglected fences, the absence of vegetables, fruit trees, and flowers, all testified to a deficiency of that steady, unremitting industry which in other lands so often beautifies and enriches the smallest tenements.

O'Grady, who was carrying out extensive drainage works and other improvements, complained loudly of his countrymen as labourers.

'Confound the fellows!' he used to say, as we talked over his plans and experiences; 'I have ten times the trouble with my hands that I ever had in Australia. There I could always lay my account to have ten thousand yards of excavation or fifty miles of fencing done, and whether by contract or daywork, could depend on a fair day's work for a fair day's wage. Here they seem to regard me as a benevolent enthusiast of untold wealth, from whom it is a matter of compliment to receive wages. "Sure he doesn't want us to be murdtherin' ourselves with hard work," they say; "hasn't he lashins of money that he made among the naygurs in Australia?" The provoking part of it is, that the very men who take this sentimental view of the relations between labour and capital are the identical individuals who, after a year's colonial experience, would be keeping pace for weeks together with the best English navvies or Australian splitters.'

'What reason can you give for such a difference in habit? *Coelum non animam mutant*, etc., plainly doesn't apply here.'

'Distinctly not; sure they *do change*, except where the divils get a lot of small farms close together; and then, even in Australia, ye'll see bad farming, improvidence, and whisky-drinking reproduced upon the exact model of Connemara; not that it's quite as bad either, for the young fellows as they grow up get away into the interior, and pick up a liberal education by travel while shearing and bullock-driving. I'll tell you what's the reason, in my opinion, and it lies at the root of half the wrongs, or rather of the misfortunes of Ireland.'

'And what may that be?' I inquired. 'Have you discovered what statesmen and sages of all political shades have failed to discern?'

'It is the absence of hope,' said O'Grady impressively. 'Look around you, and tell me what any one of these peasants can see in his possible future beyond a sufficiency of potatoes and whisky? Those are his necessaries, his luxuries all told. He can procure them with the minimum of work; while with the maximum the gain is inappreciable.'

'But why shouldn't he work when he is poor?' I inquired; 'other men do and have to do so.'

'The English farm labourer works hard and steadily every day of his life, I grant you,' answered Maurice; 'so does the Lowland Scot. They have both a strong infusion of Saxon blood, and with it inherit the power, even the love of the unquestioning, unremitting toil. But the Celts, the Highlanders, and these fellows here won't work as a religion, or as a matter of taste, or because they are told. The Celt must see something possible and splendid in the future. Show him this,

and he will toil with hand and brain ceaselessly and fervently. But he must have a gleam ever and anon of that 'light that never was on sea or shore.' Then my countrymen will work like negroes and be as abstinent as Brahmins. *But the hope they must have.* Here the divils have boundless imagination, but *no hope*—hardly so much as of a good potato crop. So, according to my theory, they don't work.'

'Pity, too,' assented I; 'the country's full of fine men—and fine women, too, for the matter of that.'

'A deal too full. It makes me savage sometimes to read some wonderful panacea in print for all our woes. One philosopher says, if the farms were properly cultivated, or all the bogs drained, or silkworms introduced, or landlords abolished, that the country could support two or three million more inhabitants.'

'I don't wonder that it should affect your temper,' I said. 'Here is this small wet island of yours already crowded with a vast population for which there appears barely standing-room. Yet these laborious lunatics wish to encumber the unhappy soil with yet larger crowds, while richer and broader lands across the sea are lacking development for want of men, women, and children.'

'You're quite right,' he said. 'It's not so long since they had half a mind to fling themselves into the arms of Louis Napoleon. I always smile to myself when I think of the grand "drafting match" he'd have had for conscripts directly he became their ruler. How he would have run out into the recruiting yard hundred after hundred of these fine, upstanding three-year-olds—I mean the youngsters from eighteen to twenty-five who are so superfluously plentiful in Ireland. Small squires, too, like Ned Athy (not but what he's a good fellow), and a lot of these strapping youngsters that never manage to

find work, but that can find time and money to be at every fair or horse race in the whole country.'

'Yes; I think the frogs would have regretted the mild rule of King Log Bull; neither is the discipline of the French army to be played with when a man has definitely gone in for *la gloire* after the military translation.'

CHAPTER XXVII

THE time wore on, and though very different were the surroundings from the rich repose and varied colouring that, even in the winter, marked the neighbourhood of Boldrewood Chase, still the field of observation was novel and extensive. Under O'Grady's guidance I paid visits or accepted hospitality among the neighbouring squires; saw households where the lavish entertainments, the crowd of retainers, the obvious decay, the fast-coming ruin of the family equalled any portrayal of fiction; others, again, where once inside the avenue gates, you might have fancied that you were in Devonshire or Kent. Saw originals, dwelling by the storm-beaten shore, with the thunder of the Atlantic sounding in their ears, who, surrounded by attendants of matchless loyalty, passed their days in sport by land or water—

> Alike to them the sea, the shore,
> The 'rod,' the bridle, and the oar;

and their nights with the solace of a few choice spirits, and the unadulterated alcohol of the locality. Saw men, still young, who, living upon small properties, had not the means for travel, and so had lost the inclination

for change. Their only recreation a rare visit to Galway, or some town of equal social standing and political importance. Found, in conversation with them, that their ideas were far more confined and unprogressive than those of the dwellers in the most distant stations of the interior of Australia. And yet, surprising to relate, I was regarded by these hibernating hermits with a ludicrous mixture of wonder and pity as the inhabitant of a far barbaric land, enjoying my first experience of the ordinary adjuncts of civilisation. The damsels, with their home questions and unaffected wonder, were freshly and originally delicious on the subject. I used to plead guilty to everything. But O'Grady, roused to wrath, would wax eloquent as he denounced their provincial dulness, and described the homes of the country gentlemen of Australia, or the refined festivities of the capitals. Him they simply did not believe.

More interesting still was it to wander amid the ruinous, romantic, half-modern, half-ancient city of Galway. Here one noticed a Moorish arch, a portal which recalled the land of the Abencerrages, a blazing noonday sun, and the swarthy southern populace. There, on a time-worn pile, could still be traced the legend—

> Remember Death!
> Vanity of vanities—all is vanity.

I listened, on a fading autumn day, to the weird tale of the 'Warden of Galway,' told by the lips of Isidora Blake, while my feigned interest in the tragedy gave me an excuse for fixing my gaze upon her. Then the girl's marvellous face, softened by a transient sympathy, shone before me like that of the wondrous Madonna which I had so often spent hours in admir*ing*. Together we walked through the curious demesne

of the race of hereditary fishermen that people 'the Claddagh,'—saw the wives and daughters of the sturdy toilers of the sea, who have there abode for a thousand years, marrying and intermarrying, to the confusion of statisticians. Together we halted near the ancient chapel of the Sept, and heard 'the Keen' swell from the first low muttering notes of grief to the wild, heaven-rending shrieks of agony intolerable—of endless sorrow.

'A sombre scene!' said I; 'the lowering sky, the leaden sea, the grass-green churchyard, the half-savage, wailing women, and the drowned fisherman, lying as his forefathers have lain, in this mossy chapel. It affects me strangely. And you?'

Isidora gazed at me fixedly for a moment, as if trying to read my inmost thoughts, and then, with half-averted eyes, replied—

'I feel a certain contagious sympathy with that wretched woman who is sitting there like a statue of despair. But why should *you* suffer depression from the sorrow of these people, who are nothing, and less than nothing, to you?'

'How often are we affected,' I made answer, 'by fictitious woes! But here, we have the present and real circumstance—the strong vitality of yesterday, now the pale corpse, lying before us. The frantic wife—the chorus of mourners—all is complete as in the most ancient tragedy. Our deeper emotions are stirred, and nature "wakes and cries" at such scenes involuntarily.'

'I am afraid you're very romantic and fanciful, are you not?'

'I have not hitherto been called an unpractical person,' I made answer; 'but if there be a slight infusion of romance in one's disposition, what then?'

'I detest sentimentalism,' said she passionately. 'It is only fit for dreamers and silly girls. There is surely work and pleasure enough in the world to fill a man's heart without aimless musings and unreal fantasies.'

'Scoffers say that your sex is not tolerant of imagination or humour,' I was driven to reply; 'but whatever Miss Blake says is law, wisdom, and divine right, all commingled. I capitulate. I daresay it will be almost dark before we get home.'

The slight uncongeniality was tided over. I felt chilled and disappointed nevertheless. I had always painted the 'possible princess' as of the highest intellectual appreciation, tenderly sympathetic, with all the loftier aspirations—one with whom all æsthetic tendencies would be in companionship exalted, strengthened, and purified. As to the ordinary duties of life, I had hitherto been able to successfully arrange for their transaction principally by deputy. Granted a permanent provision for the material wants of life, what was to prevent a congenial pair—welded 'soul to soul and hand to hand'—from revelling in the delights of the inner sanctuary—intensifying, by interchange, the highest exaltation of the ideal in art and nature?

My eyes were opened thus far; I saw that so fair a vision would never be realised for me if I won Isidora Blake. There was time for withdrawal. I was not as yet, in honour, irrevocably committed. I argued the question until reason decided unreservedly against me. But I was past the prudential stage. The spell of the enchantress was too enthralling. I felt as men of the earliest days of mortal temptation have felt and fallen. I was powerless as he who glides on the glassy, resistless incline of the rapid to arrest my course. After a rigid self-examination I awoke to the consciousness that my whole soul

and being, present happiness, and future welfare, were indissolubly bound up in Isidora Blake—*as she was.* Such being the verdict, it was plainly necessary to learn my fate at the earliest moment compatible with reasonable precautions. I proposed therefore to concentrate on this enterprise the remainder of my visit to Mount Blake.

It seemed to be taken for granted that I was there permanently domiciled. O'Grady occasionally rallied me upon the subject of my return to Australia, where he said matters might be going rightly or wrongly for all that I cared.

'I've sold out, my boy,' he would say; 'and I don't know that I'm a happier man this day for that same; but ye never know from one day to another what may happen to stock, and you away; sheep may catch an infectious disease in a week, and fifty thousand of them be deteriorated in value to the amount of ten shillings a head; cattle may get "pleuro," and be dying at the rate of a hundred a day, while you're giving a ball in Melbourne, or getting up a picnic in Sydney; or in the halls of light you are handed a telegram (as happened to a friend of mine) which runs thus—"Men all drunk; station going to the devil!"'

'That sounds bad, Maurice; but there are such things as good overseers, active young brothers, and energetic governors. I think the Boldrewood stock may boast of all these kinds of supervision. You know I've worked hard for years, and a man's intelligence is limited to that of a mill-horse who cannot take a holiday occasionally.'

'True, my boy,' answered the jovial Maurice, '*carpe diem* while it lasts; sure it's swate enough in youth. But ye'll go to Clanmorris this evening. Didn't I come to drive you over?'

'All right,' I answered; 'I feel as if a good yarn about old times would do me good. Go in and have a fight with Miss Harriet, as you generally do, and I'll get my kit ready.'

'So you're going to run away with Mr. O'Grady?' said Isidora reproachfully, with an appealing look, which nearly caused me to forswear that trusty comrade, and dash down my portmanteau.

I muttered something about an old promise; while Harriet Blake said—

'It was just like Mr. O'Grady; he never came near the place except to do or say something unpleasant.'

'Sure he had a letter from Australia, with all kinds of bad news in it,' retorted Maurice mischievously; 'and he'll have to lave by next mail—won't ye, Rolf, me boy?'

I saw Isidora change colour ever so slightly at this audacious fabrication, and annoyed as I was at the unwarrantable pleasantry, I felt a certain satisfaction at the effect of the shot, for the firing of which I could not be held responsible.

'Don't believe a word of it,' I interposed hastily. 'You know Maurice's practical jokes of old' (here Miss Harriet uttered a vow of deadly vengeance). 'I am not going to leave Europe for the next year or two, and as for Galway, I feel as if I had lived here all my life. I have no doubt but that I shall stay till you are all tired of me.'

'Never think that!' said Isidora, with more warmth than was customary with her; and as I shook hands at parting, I thought—perhaps I dreamed—that a slight involuntary closing of her delicate palm requited the lingering pressure of my own hand.

'Bedad, you can go in and win,' said Maurice, as we cleared the avenue gates with the whirling rush of his

high-conditioned steppers. 'Tis what I never saw her do before—change colour at the thought of any one laving her royal presence; and it's she that's been worshipped and bowed down to since she was the height of a turf-kish.'

'I believe you are mistaken,' said I; 'but whether or no, I intend to put my fortune to the trial when we go back.'

'*You're* all right, my boy,' quoth the sagacious Maurice; 'I wish I saw my way as clear with that cowld-hearted Grand Inquisitor, Harriet. Sure I'm two years in torture—a living *auto-da-fé*—and the divil a sign of relenting about her more than Torquemada for a roasted Jew.'

'Lookers-on see the game more clearly, it is remarked,' said I. 'So I may state, for your information, that I think the fair Harriet affects an amount of combativeness with you which conceals real interest.'

'D'ye tell me so?' he replied, with amusing eagerness. 'Sure if I thought——'

'Well, *do you* go in and win,' said I. 'Now's your time, as you kindly told me.'

'No; I've time and to spare; you must storm the breach, or raise the siege. I can sit down before the citadel, like the Greeks before Troy, having burned my ships; you remember I always liked to make doubly sure in all my speculations—and this is the greatest of them all.'

'Next week will decide for me,' said I; 'you can arrange your affairs as you please.'

'I wish you luck, my dear Rolf,' said he, seizing my hand warmly; 'I have only a word of warning. Take care of old Dillon—the divil a harder nail ever ye seen. We'll steady the horses up the hill. There's a well, with a cross on the low side; and sure, there's pretty

Mary Joyce walking up to it, with the crock on her head. May I niver, if she isn't as handsome in her way as Miss Blake! See the walk of her, and how she steps with those iligant legs of hers, and the divil a shoe or stocking to spoil the shape of them!'

In no county in Ireland, perhaps, is the standard of rustic beauty higher than in Galway. Not for the first time did I now notice the perfect shape, the free natural carriage, the classic outline of the peasant girl, who, with the pitcher on her head, was walking towards the well, covered partly with moss-grown masonry. Whether international trading had done something towards a fusion of races, I know not. Certain it is that the Spanish traits of dark-hued hair and complexion are chiefly noticeable among the Galway peasantry, while the graceful walk common to all ranks of Spanish women is rarely to be seen in any other county in Ireland.

We had driven nearer to the fair object of our admiration, following the winding road, when a man suddenly came up a hilly pathway, and throwing his arms round the slender waist, clasped her rudely in his arms.

As she turned her face, I shall never forget the wild terror of her dilated eyes, nor the thrilling scream which rang through the air.

'Ha! purty Mary Joyce!' said the fellow, a burly, misshapen Caliban; 'sure ye wouldn't scream if it was the Sassenach groom; didn't I see ye with him yesterday?'

'Let me down, Maurice,' said I, 'till I knock the scoundrel's head off; the poor girl will die of fright. See how she writhes, and how white her face is!'

'Take care!' said he, pulling sharply up; 'it is that brute of an idiot (or natural, they call lunatics here), Shaun Buoy; I wonder what the deuce they leave them at large for.'

I made a hasty stride forward, but was too late to champion the distressed damsel. She found a sufficiently alert defender in the person of Mr. James Whitby, who unexpectedly (to me) appeared on the scene. Bounding up the same path from which Shaun Buoy (or Yellow John—so called from his masses of thick, curling hair) had reached the well, he gripped that worthy by the neck, and with a twist of his foot and a sudden swing, hurled him on to his back, with sufficient force to deprive him of his breath temporarily, while he applied himself to the comfort of the sobbing maid with something of the readiness of an acquaintance not wholly recent.

'Look out, Jim!' I said, as the 'natural,' recovering his wind and his feet, gave a howl of rage, and with murder in his sunken eyes rushed savagely at the pair. His shoulders were broad, and his long arms immensely muscular, though his bowed limbs lowered his height to less than that of average man. But he had no local amateur to deal with. The Australian quietly put aside his lovely companion, and arranging his hands after the traditional British fashion, permitted Shaun to come within reach, when catching a fair and straight left-hander, he went down among the stones, apparently for good and all.

'Time!' said O'Grady, with mock solemnity. 'Bedad, Master Jim, ye'll kill the big villain if ye don't mind, and then ye'll have the whole village upon ye for destroying a harmless "natural." He's a dale more rogue than fool, to my mind. Off with ye, now—so best,' he concluded, as the "omadthaun," rising with difficulty, shook his fist at his antagonist, and with a hoarse cry started off at a dog-trot towards the village.

'Well, Jim,' said I, 'this is quite an adventure. It

was most fortunate your coming by so unexpectedly, eh?'

Here my worthy follower lost his usual self-possession, but facing the emergency, after a moment's hesitation, said—

'I don't deny, sir, that I've seen the young woman once or twice before. We happened to meet about a fortnight since at a wake the Mount Blake servants took me to. I was coming up the track to the well, when I heard her sing out, and was just in time to floor that hulking brute that ought to be in Tarban Creek, or whatever they call their place for looneys here. But I expect you'd have muzzled him, sir?'

'Most probably,' I answered; 'and now, I suppose, we can leave Miss Mary Joyce, with the assurance that you will see her safely home.'

'You may, indeed, thank you, sir,' he returned.

We went on our way, and were soon spinning along the limestone-covered plain, at the junction of which, with a wood of larger dimensions than usual, was O'Grady's home.

'It wasn't much of a place when I took possession,' he explained; 'I bought it from the former proprietor, who, eaten up with mortgages, hadn't been able to do anything but pay the interest—and that by a miracle—for the last thirty years. As to repairing a farmhouse, putting up a fence, making a drain, or roofing a cabin, it was as much out of his power as rebuilding Sydenham Crystal Palace.'

'And how the deuce did the tenantry get on?' I asked; 'for, I presume, he had plenty.'

'Swarms, of course. Well, they lived, except in a bad season. Merton would have helped them, poor old boy, only there was nothing earthly in his power but to remit their rent, and as he seldom received any,

that afforded no relief in time of need. They had been educated, by the neglect of centuries, to a life without a margin, and when severe seasons came they had to lie down and die.'

'What a frightful state of things!' I said.

'You may say that,' quoth Maurice. 'Some of the tales of the Great Famine would make your hair stand on end, as they did mine. Strong men wasted to whispering shadows, women and children dying by the wayside in families. Fine people too, if they had a chance. But chained to the crowded soil, huddled up in tens of thousands in Connemara there—a regular "back block" if ever there was one—all rock and mountain—what could they do?'

'And who is to blame for this waste of life, happiness, and good labour?' I asked.

'Men like Malachi Merton and his forefathers—and *mine* too—for selfishly spending their incomes in mad extravagance, and aimless emulation among themselves; those who kept the people ignorant, whoever they were; and lastly, the people themselves, with their childish, tender hearts, and warm affections, that led them to die by their cold hearthstones, rather then desert them.'

As he spoke, his voice changed, his cheek glowed, and his eyes sparkled. The cool Maurice O'Grady was a changed man, and I saw the promptings of a higher nature than I had hitherto given the successful colonist credit for.

'With these ideas, you have something to do here, old fellow,' said I; 'when you set up house here you'll have an aim and a mission, and all that sort of thing; and you are the man to carry it out, if I know anything of Maurice O'Grady.'

'Please God, I will, if I live!' said he. 'I never failed in anything yet, so far. And now, here's the

home station! We'll talk "bush" all the rest of the evening.'

O'Grady's home was a vast, ancient, imposing structure, which had formerly boasted considerable architectural pretensions. The situation was fine, the view grand and extensive, while the tasteful restoration of the whole edifice showed that money and intelligent direction had of late years been combined. Little had been changed, though all things had evidently been placed in a state of repair undreamed of, as unseen by the oldest vassal.

'Come in, me boy, and stretch those long legs of yours. We are wind and weather tight now, which was far from being the case when I took possession.'

Later in the evening, as we luxuriated in a cosy smoking-room after an exceedingly good dinner, O'Grady propounded to me his ideas for the regeneration of his native county, and the combination of reasonable profit with one of those great enterprises which his soul loved.

CHAPTER XXVIII

HE had commenced to form a shorthorn herd of unquestioned purity of blood. He was about to introduce a more profitable breed of sheep. He had bought up all the contiguous properties that could be got hold of, and had thus acquired an extensive tract of country, which he was draining, planting, fencing, and cropping in accordance with the new lights of agriculture, and all his ancient energy.

'This is very fine,' said I meditatively; 'still we

used to question the paying nature of unlimited improvements in our own country. But what of "your own flesh and blood?" as Mr. Gladstone puts it—what of the children of the soil—deuced damp soil it is too?'

'I had an awful amount of bother with them, I must own,' said he; 'and it isn't all done yet. It broke the heart of me almost—there were such hordes of them. Fancy buying a run in Riverina, with twenty miles of frontage, and finding four hundred families on that alone, which is nothing to the density of population on some estates.'

'But they would pay rent, and cultivate the land?' I argued.

'The divil a pay; or, if they did furnish a trifle of real, absolute cash occasionally, it was swallowed up in the difficulty of collection, and the "harassing legislation," to which I should have been compelled to resort to ensure any regularity of income. As for cultivation, the less said about that the better.'

'Then what did you effect eventually?' I inquired.

'I assisted a large proportion to emigrate to America. Those who were amenable to reason I persuaded to go to Australia. To the able-bodied men I have given constant employment at comparatively high wages. I am weeding out the bad and irreclaimable by degrees, though I don't know but what I may get "improved off the face of the earth" myself some fine day. I've felt a deuced sight safer within a mile of a gang of bushrangers than I do here occasionally.'

'It's as bad as taking up new country,' said I compassionately.

'Worse—a hundred times worse; keep the blacks away, and you were always pretty safe; but here you are in the midst of a more or less hostile population night and day. And a Ribbon agent may drop you

as you come home from hunting, or let drive a handful of slugs through the window—as we're sitting here this minute.'

'God forbid!' said I heartily. At which he laughed.

'I'm an Irishman, and so I must bear it, Rolf, as I've been brought up to it. And as I've commenced this thing, I'll see it out, you may be sure.'

'I know that, old fellow; but now let us dismiss these philanthropical and homicidal reflections; they seem to run curiously close to one another in these parts. I'll play you a match of billiards—the best of three—and then to bed.'

The next morning dissipated unpleasant thoughts on O'Grady's part. That he was going to fall in the breach, a pioneer of civilisation, became a remote contingency; so we rode together over his property, when he exhibited the improvements made under his direction with pardonable pride.

'Do you see those slate-roofed cottages?' he said; 'every tenant of them swore he would die of cold if I took the rotten thatch off.

'"I haven't a great while to live," said one old fellow solemnly; "and sure ye'll let me die in pace, without piling thim cold stones above the head of me."

'"Didn't ye have fever last year?—answer me that."

'"I had, and, glory be to God, I recovered from that same!"

'"Take my way now," said I; "I'll guarantee you never have the fever among you again, if you'll be ruled by me."'

'Did you conquer their prejudices in the long run?'

'I did—"with money and fair words"; and I am now organising another scheme to lighten the pressure of population. I have some property still in Australia, you know.'

'I was aware of that fact—wished I had half the little property.'

'Well, as the young couples marry — and they marry early too, the improvident rascals that they are! (wonderfully moral, though, I grant that)—I give them a passage out, and a few pounds to start with, and let them have a farm at Burrawonga. The land is rich there; they can either become "cockatoos," or take to boundary riding, shepherding, or stock-keeping, whichever they prefer. Anyhow, Ireland sees them no more; and they go to a land where every child they have, if they have twenty, can have a sheep to eat for his own share once a month, and a hundredweight of flour every quarter, besides a catty-box of tea and a bag of sugar yearly.'

'That sounds well in their ears within hail of Lough Corrib, I doubt not,' said I. 'But it's wonderful how little they think of these food miracles in the land of Goshen, when once they have crossed the desert.'

'True for you; sure human nature was always perverse—so they tell us; and when ye come to Irish nature all calculation and experience are at fault. Can't ye fancy one of these boys, who doesn't see meat once a month, or has as much chance of getting it as of *pâté de foie gras* or *canard truffié*, walking gravely up to the overseer, saying that the hut-keeper couldn't get a sheep last night, and how could a man be expected to work without a bit of mate for breakfast?'

'I've seen it many a time,' I answered; 'perhaps it's the voyage—which is long and lazy—that demoralises them, or the bad example of the colonial hands; but it is the fact, nevertheless, that vegetarian Paddy is the first man to kick up a dust about the temporary absence of beefsteaks from any meal whatsoever of his gratuitously supplied and abundant board.'

'"There's nae perfection," as that Scotchman at Hamilton's told us, you remember, when he conceded the fact of his wife having a thick waist. But I find my countrymen, as colonists, just about as good and as bad as other Britons. The next generation of them at Burrawonga will be better taught, better fed, and better able than their fathers to do their share towards intelligently governing themselves. More than that I don't expect. And so much will repay me amply for my trouble.'

'And is your idea of a trans-Pacific and glorified Connemara actually progressive and in working order?' I inquired.

'Every month,' he answered, 'sees the farms enlarging—the unreasonable, unprofitable tillage being turned into grazing. I have established schools, including something like a model industrial college, where the youngsters can learn the *a*, *b*, *c* of chemistry and agriculture.'

'I wish you all kinds of luck, old fellow,' said I heartily. 'It keeps you employed at any rate, and may be said to save your life in that respect, as I know, if he couldn't work hard at something there would soon be an end of Maurice O'Grady.'

The next was very nearly a fine day, wonderful to relate, so mounted on a couple of well-bred hackneys we did a long day's ride round O'Grady's property. Extensive and picturesque in places, remarkably good land, it yet showed by half-tenanted hamlets, or rows of roofless cabins, that a considerable migration had lately taken place.

'A sad sight always,' said I, pointing to a cluster of ruined abodes. 'Are you sure you are not assisting that undesirable stage of civilisation

Where wealth accumulates and men decay?'

'There's a plausible ring about that line, I confess,' said he; 'though, when such an unpractical goose as old Oliver Goldsmith affirmed an economic axiom of any sort, it was pretty sure to be wrong.

Where men accumulate and wealth decays,

was far truer about the circumstances which led to the sinfully excessive over-population of Ireland. Any one might have predicted the inevitable calamity (old Cobbett notably did). And it came. But for emigration, Irish famines would have been as periodical and terrible as those of Bengal.'

'A distinguished countryman of your own once said, Maurice, that if one Irishman were to be roasted, you could always get another Irishman to turn the spit. You seem to be rather hard on them yourself.'

'I'll give them all a spit of their own about here,' said he laughingly; 'and maybe something to roast on it, too, before I've done. But I don't conceal their shortcomings. Since I've been to Australia things look differently to me. It will all work right in the end, I daresay.'

Notwithstanding Goldsmith, I could not but feel deeply interested in the well-considered enterprises which O'Grady had organised. He had gone to work with his proverbial shrewdness and liberality. On all sides, well-fenced enclosures, arterial drainage works, careful cultivation, and neat farm buildings met my view. Improved breeds of cattle—Ayrshires, Herefords, and Shorthorns—revelled in the wide pasture lands, for which the estate had long been famous. The small mountain sheep, with the exception of a flock at the home-farm, kept for mutton, had been displaced by broad-backed Lincolns and Cotswolds. The plough and waggon teams showed that Clydesdales and

Suffolks had been imported with no unsparing hand. There was a cheese and butter factory on the American plan, while the hams and flitches of bacon, stored in quantities ready for export, showed that the proverbial pig of the cottier had been superseded by the less agile but more profitable porcine cube from Berkshire. We entered well-built, well-attended schools, full of ruddy-faced, neatly clothed children. Gangs and troops of labourers, in all directions, were employed under intelligent supervision on the works in progress; while to my extreme surprise I suddenly encountered the sunburnt visage of an old acquaintance, a former overseer of O'Grady's, whom I believed to be somewhere in the great salt-bush plain of Riverina at that very moment.

'Why, Johnnie Donnellan!' said I incredulously, 'am I to believe that this is yourself, in the flesh? You look fairly well for a ghost. But I never dreamed you were anywhere but at Yarrangajeldree, where I last met you mustering fat cattle.'

'Mr. Boldrewood,' said the individual thus addressed —a big, brown-faced, pleasant-looking man about thirty, who, dressed in a suit of rough grey tweed and round hat, was directing a party of labourers busy at pulling down and carting away a dilapidated stone wall—'it's a sight for sore eyes to see a gentleman from the old place again. Didn't the master tell you I was here?'

'No, Johnnie!' answered Maurice for himself; 'sure I wanted to give him a little start. You can tell him now that I thought a change to a "green grass country" would do you good, and that you were due for it, after those dry seasons in that howling desert of Yarrangajeldree.'

'Well, sir, it's all very well for a year or two; and

it was a real blessing for the first few months to have no flies or mosquitoes, and no fear of the water drying up. It's a ripping grass country about here, though it's awful wet, and eaten up alive with "free selectors" —I mean people.'

'And how do you think life in the old country will suit you, Johnnie?' I further inquired.

'Oh, I'm not going to *live* here, sir,' returned the Australian quickly. 'Mr. O'Grady only had me home for a couple of years to help knock this place into working order, he says. I couldn't live here, not if you was to make me a present of the lot, purchased land and all. It's too small; no extent of country, no chance to get on in life. My people came from about here, and I'm glad I've seen it. But give me the open country for it.'

'I'm not sure but that I'm of your opinion myself, Johnnie,' I answered—'for the present, at any rate; you don't know how you may feel when you are old. You and I may be glad to sit down in a settled district yet, eh?'

'Can't say how it may be when a man's grey, or used up, or married, or something of that sort, sir,' said he reflectively. 'But I want a few years more mustering, or exploring, or camping out, before I'm put on the tether, or paddocked up in a place like this. How the fellows stand it in these parts licks me! But I think I've opened some of their eyes for 'em.'

'I think you have, Johnnie,' said Maurice approvingly; 'we shall see a good many Galway faces on the Narran and the Lachlan by and by.'

'Some of the youngsters are getting pretty restless now,' answered the henchman, 'and all the better for 'em. Fine chaps, too; I should like to have the breaking in of them when they come out.'

'So you shall, Johnnie,' said his master; 'you will be the man to handle them till they come to their bearings. They won't be able to tell you any yarns about what they were used to at home.'

'I think not, sir, and we shall get on all the better for it. Good-morning, Mr. Boldrewood.'

Here we rode towards another part of the estate, where O'Grady had a small flock of pure Spanish merinos, which he had been at some considerable expense to procure from their own country, and from which, as they were of the highest known lineage, and from a 'cabana' of utterly inestimable value, he expected a stud flock which would render Burrawonga a kind of Mecca in the merino faith of the period.

'I went over to Spain, me boy, intirely on their account, saw a bull-fight, and crossed the plains of Estramadura. Wonderfully like Australia in many respects! No wonder both nations went into the fine wool-producing business. The same hot, stony plains, the same style of watercourses, the same rocky ravines. Only one country is stationary or retrograde; the other is advancing with the speed of an express train towards wealth, power, and civilisation.'

'Thank you kindly, Maurice, as you say in these parts; and so you did not consider my nerves, and permitted me to come across Johnnie Donnellan without warning.'

'I did then—I wanted your opinion about the speculation without any explanation beforehand. And Johnnie is a part, and a very important part, of the whole grand idea.'

'Well, it *is* a grand idea, Maurice,' said I, 'and worthy of you. People in Australia used to say your heart was as good as your head; so they wondered you ever made any money.'

He grasped my hand, and wrung it without speaking.

'I was lucky, Rolf, me boy, *lucky*, that's all. Didn't I lose all my money but a mere trifle, and toss up in rale earnest whether I should go back to Ireland or try a last chance in Australia? It came down "heads," and I laid out my last few hundreds in cattle (deuced near drowned they were, too, crossing the Murray). I made cent per cent on them, and never touched anything that didn't pay after. And now, please God, what I have will benefit others beside myself.'

'You deserve every shilling you have made,' said I. 'But you were going to tell me about Johnnie Donnellan.'

'Bedad! he's my grand idea intirely. I have a notion that I should have made a Talleyrand or a Bismarck if I'd taken to Foreign Office instead of the Colonial Department. Well, I was smoking one evening, after breaking my heart explaining to a lot of great strong divils with nothing to do what a great country Australia was. They listened with politeness, but I was doubtful if they believed a word. "Sure I wanted to get them away" (they thought) "to a hot furrin place, where they'd be sold into slavery, maybe, or ate up by wild bastes." What will I do, thought I, to show them what sort of a man an Irishman turns into out there.'

'Now I see, so you thought of Johnnie. Couldn't have hit on a better "sample."'

'You have it. I had just got a letter from Macintosh, my general manager, to say that Johnnie Donnellan had come down with the tenth lot of fat cattle in six months, and that he looked overworked and complained of his eyes. So I wrote at once, had him sent home, and here he is, where he's worth more to me as an advertisement for the colonies than a dozen emigration lecturers.'

'How is that?' I inquired.

'This way. I can refer to him, you see, personally. "Look here," I say, "ye spalpeens, there's a man for ye! go and wrestle a fall with him, and see if the heat has relaxed his muscles." You know what a great powerful chap he is.'

'Yes, indeed,' I said; 'don't you remember his picking up that stockyard-post and putting it on his shoulders at Wargildah? There was not another man at the muster who could do it.'

'Sure he has an arm like a horse's leg. Then he is a smart, honest, sober chap, can keep accounts well, reads a little, and writes a good fist. "You might remember his grandfather," I said, "Thady Donnellan, that rented two acres of mountain land, and had the sinse to lave it for Botany Bay."

'"We do," they all said, "that is, ould Patsy Hagan tould us."

'"And now what do you think of Johnnie there?" I demanded of them; "do you think it would be any harm to see your gossoons growing up like him? Do you know I give him £200 a year, with everything found? He lives as well as I do, and maybe will buy a station of his own some day."

'"Begorra!" said the spokesman, a shrewd fellow enough, "he's a gintleman, that's what he is; he might stay wid us and set up for a 'half sir,' only that he has no pride at all, at all. The divil resave the bit! Sure he'll sit down wid us and smoke, and tell stories of the wild cattle and the kangaroos, and hunting the quare bastes of birds with dogs, by the hour together."'

'They were converted, then?'

'Every mother's son of them. Johnnie acted as a sort of native missionary, and by degrees they would come and ask his advice, and listen with an undoubting

belief that no stranger or landlord could have commanded.'

'I suppose they saw he could work?'

'Why, yes; in the hay-field, or reaping, mowing, stacking (he was a small farmer's son, you know), none of them could come near him. Then his riding and shooting used to make them stare. He is a droll fellow, too, with lots of humour in a quiet way, and in the end became amazingly popular.'

CHAPTER XXIX

AS we rode in towards the ancient mansion, the massive walls and time-worn gables of which were softened by the fading light; as we followed the winding avenue, where the gaps were filled with freshly-planted saplings, I thought how utterly dissimilar were the surroundings to those amid which O'Grady and I had spent the best—yes, the *best*—part of our lives. Vex me not, O reader, whomsoever ye be, with denial, for on this point I brook no contradiction. 'The brave old days of pleasure and pain'—days of fond hope and deep faith—are they not those which intervene between the second and third 'lustrum'?

'The day's ride is done, Maurice,' said I, 'and we have made a certainty of our appetites for dinner, which is in itself important. Now, tell me a secret, are you happier than if you were coming in tired to the slab cottage at Burrawonga or Wargildah, to a supper of corned beef, bread and tea, with a smoke afterwards, and a good draft of fat cattle ready for going off?'

'I am *not* as happy,' said he, 'if the measure of

happiness includes high health, spirits, enjoyment of the present, trust in the future. But it's the old story, the difference between anticipation and possession—the difference between Wellington at the moment of "Up, Guards, and at 'em!" and of dining at the Guildhall and receiving the freedom of the City of London. I was a General of Division then; now I'm an eater of turtle and trout, a judge of claret—more be token, that same is pretty good, and I've asked the two padres to help us drink some of it to-night.'

'How do you get on with the priest?' I inquired; 'does he aid or embarrass you?'

'Father O'Hara is a most worthy man, and we get on very well. We had an understanding directly I came. I put it to him in this way. "Sir," said I, "you are the spiritual pastor of two or three hundred families, who live on the land of which I am become the owner. We are the chief powers; let us have a treaty. Mr. Markham, the Protestant clergyman, is only a small state, by rason of the scarcity of Protestants in these parts, whereof I am an unworthy unit."

'"I understand," says he, looking at me with a mighty keen eye. "What is the first article?"

'"Non-intervention," emphatically I answered; "if you subscribe to it, you will find me a faithful ally, and a jolly good neighbour. I come here to do these people good—in my own way, let it be understood—certainly not in theirs. I find them nearly all of a certain religious denomination. I am in no way minded to convert them. It is not, I humbly consider, my affair. I wish them, however, to be well taught, and I will therefore assist and subsidise your schools to the highest point of efficiency. Of course I shall do the same, neither more nor less, for Mr. Markham's. I will

beg to be allowed to contribute to any system of local relief to the poor and deserving, and will repair any buildings used for such purpose. I shall trust that each denomination will do its best for its members, without antagonism. And I hope that the Reverend Mr. O'Hara will be equally my good friend and neighbour, as my old acquaintance and co-religionist Mr. Markham."

'Father O'Hara looked hard at me as I came out with this rather long speech (which was not very unlike one I delivered to the electors of the Upper Murray, when I stood for that important constituency), and then taking my hand, said, "The treaty is signed, Mr. O'Grady, and Father O'Hara will not be the first to break it."'

'And has there been no case for international arbitration, no infringement of the rights of neutrals, since this memorable ratification?' I inquired.

'Not a shade of doubt or disturbance since that day. I help Father O'Hara rasonably, and contribute to his and Mr. Markham's schools. He backs up me authority, and, occasionally, lends the weight of his influence to me emigration and other projects.'

I met the priest at dinner that evening, and found him a shrewd, sensible, humorous man, on good terms with Mr. Markham, the Protestant clergyman, and fully qualified to appreciate the sterling excellence of O'Grady's character.

'And what do ye think of our wild country, Mr. Boldrewood?' said he, after our introduction. 'What sort of a character will ye give us on your return to Australia? Are we improving, standing still, or going to the bad?'

'I hear on every side,' said I, 'that Ireland was never more prosperous than at present, partly owing to

the diminished population since the famine, and partly to the improved rate of wages. But I confess that the land looks to me, even now, terribly over-populated; what appearance it must have presented with a population of eight millions I can hardly imagine.'

'You say truly, sir,' he replied; 'that the people were too thick on the land, no one but a wild enthusiast for Home Rule could deny. But at present labour is well paid, and the people are contented, though we can't be got to think that there are too many of them.'

'You see them,' I returned—'pardon me for saying so—with eyes accustomed to these unemployed crowds. I can only see the disproportion of the population to any field for their energies; can but regret that their faculty of easy contentment with the injustice of circumstance should prevent them from rising to the dignity of labour in more favoured lands.'

'But,' said Mr. Markham, a well-read, somewhat subdued-looking Englishman, who had passed many years in the oversight of a small and stationary congregation, 'do you not hold contentment and obedience to be virtues among the lowly?'

'I am not sure that I do; content never turned out discoverers, conquerors, or heroic personages of any kind.'

'I fear that colonists do not retain the quality of reverence among those good ones which they undoubtedly possess,' answered he.

'My dear sir,' said I—'pardon me any seeming irreverence. Our family have always been staunch adherents of the Church of England, and I trust will long continue to be. But if we reserve the right of private judgment and——'

'See here, Rolf,' interposed O'Grady, 'we did not meet this evening for you to discuss theology with Mr.

Markham, or even emigration with Father O'Hara there —fascinating topics, but dangerous, me boy! Can ye give me another day, and we'll all go down to the seashore and have a sail? Father O'Hara is no end of a boatman. He remembers the days when they did a little smuggling here once upon a time, eh, Father? French brandy was mighty cheap then, if ye knew where to inquire for it. Next day we'll go back to Mount Blake; I know ye're dying for another talk with—ahem! Dillon Blake; sure, he's the amusing man!'

'*You* don't intend to visit Mount Blake for months, of course!' I said. 'However, I must go back; I promised to be in England for some hunting before the season was over; my old uncle is too kind for me to throw him over altogether. So we'll have one day's fishing, sailing, or anything you like; then we must head for Mount Blake again.'

The evening passed most agreeably; we had some whist, in the course of which my partner, Father O'Hara, showed that his clear head and retentive memory were not entirely absorbed by parochial labours. We despoiled the opulent Maurice and his partner to a reasonable extent, and concluded the labours of the day with a modest tumbler of punch in the smoking-room.

Father O'Hara became fairly confidential as we sat smoking, with the least suspicion of a second tumbler before us.

'I begin to think, Mr. Boldrewood,' said he, as we resumed — Maurice notwithstanding — the fascinating subject of emigration, 'that we Roman Catholic clergy would get on better with colonists as landlords than with our own gentry. There seems to me a special fairness and equality, as between man and man, notice-

able among those who have been away in Australia, that we do not find in the residents.'

'They rub off prejudices, doubtless,' said I, 'and the keenness of traditionary feud is dulled.'

'That may account for it in great part,' he answered; 'I have repeatedly observed it. I don't say that our friend O'Grady here likes or permits disrespect in any shape; but he has a blunt way of showing, in all his dealings with the tenantry, that he considers every man, no matter of what faith, as the absolute equal of another. The fairness of his rule is so obvious that he will never have the trouble some landlords have in Ireland.'

'I can answer for the feeling in the colonies, that O'Grady only represents all landed proprietors, employers, or officials there. Distinctions of race or faith are rarely inquired into; frequently, indeed, never even known. You have seen my countryman Johnnie Donnellan? does he look like a man who has been made to suffer under disabilities because of his creed?'

'He does not,' said the priest emphatically; 'he stands up and looks straight at you like a freeman who takes his birthright without question; who has neither to fight for it at every turn, nor to crouch and bide his time for vengeance. My blessing on the men who lived with him and his like, as Christians and brothers, and on the land where Christianity is practised as well as preached. You have made a friend of Tom O'Hara. Good-night, sir.'

The good man wrung my hand and passed out.

'What in the world's come over Father O'Hara? Has he converted ye, Rolf, and are ye going to join the ancient Church? Or maybe it's only in case of a certain contingency; sure, a retirement to a good cool monastery wouldn't be such an unpleasant idea to an

Australian. I knew Father O'Hara was a man of talent, but I didn't think he'd "chop" ye like that.'

'Mr. Markham has heard you talk nonsense before,' I answered, 'so I won't apologise to him for you, as we are all sleepy. Good-night.'

The dawn rose on such a day as I had not seen during the whole period of my visit to Ireland. Not that the sky was absolutely cloudless, but, as far as reasonable conjecture might attain, it seemed almost certain that no rain would fall. The air was mild, even balmy. As I strolled through the plantations and freshly-sown lawns, which O'Grady was initiating amid the neglected wild, there was a sufficiently new look about the place to make me think of my own land. While marvelling at the utter effacement of all the traditional and customary beauty of an old estate—the felled timber, the ruined buildings, the broken fences, the poached and trodden lawns and shrubberies just being replaced—I could not but wonder how the downward path of ruin should happen to be trodden by so many feet in this country, to the same unvarying measure, and at about the same period of time. 'Can there be mental epidemics?' thought I; 'and does the moral atmosphere generate the fatal spores, which, once attracted, have power to draw down the "mind diseased" to the same level of stupor or delirium? how else account for the decay of a kingdom, the ruin of a race? Surely, as in other classes of men, there must be original differences of tendency. And yet the records of the Encumbered Estates Court show a common ruin to have fallen upon the landed interest, with the pitilessness of a natural calamity, alike upon the just and the unjust.'

I was roused from this, perhaps, unprofitable train of thought by the cheery voice of O'Grady, who

demanded to know if I had not heard the gong for breakfast, and whether I was afraid wool had seen its best days that I looked so thoughtful and abstracted.

'I was thinking more of your country, old fellow,' said I, 'than my own; though, to tell the truth, the governor's last letter had a sort of undercurrent of foreboding about it as if things were beginning to look unsettled. However, let us enjoy ourselves to-day. You don't often have one like it to boast of, you know. To-morrow we'll go in for "life is real, life is earnest," but let this day be given over to such a holiday as we shall both remember in time to come.'

Mr. Markham had some duty which called him away, but Father O'Hara remained, and was bent upon showing me the wonders of the shore.

'See here, Mr. Boldrewood,' he said, as he rose from an ancient-looking tome which he had borne in from the library. 'I am not much in the hunting field, though I like a good greyhound, more by token I kept one or two not so long ago, but once I'm on salt water I turn my back on no man. So I'll show you one of the few pleasures to-day we wild western people have to make the most of.'

'Agreed,' said I with all my heart. 'Sydney men also are not wholly devoid of interest in boats, eh, Maurice?'

The seashore lay at no great distance from the house, to which it had contributed, if old tales were true, many a keg of French brandy 'as mild as milk' —fusel-oil being then apparently unknown—with many a pipe of claret, mysteriously discovered on the lawn after a dark night and a successful 'run.' To it we fared after a leisurely breakfast, and I was amused to note, as we came within sound of the roll of the Atlantic surges, how the priest's steps became more

elastic, how his eye brightened and his form became erect. Such a transformation I had often marked when the man, whoever he might be, and his proper work or beloved sport, at which he felt himself to be strong and excelling, were about to be united.

When we know by experience what dignity is imparted by the conviction of use and aptness of vocation, whether in science, art, woodcraft, or even the slightly-held superiority in games of skill or chance, how melancholy is the thought that so frequently in the long journey of life the artist lingers divorced from his art-bride, the poet from his burning thoughts, and the hunter from the gay greenwood. Thrice blessed he whose every power sways easily to the summons of an occupation embodying a lifelong friendship, of an art cherished with unearthly love.

In a sheltered nook, masked by an avenue of aged trees, in better preservation than much timber of the estate, a cove had been formed by a rudely-built but massive breakwater and a wharf, of which the completeness and extent bore testimony to the importance which the former lords of Clanmorris had attached to their marine privileges. A ruin of great antiquity added to the effect of the scene, the beauty of which came suddenly upon me as we emerged from the winding pathway.

'Who built that, Maurice?' I inquired; 'and were the ancestors of your predecessor Northmen or Danes that they went in for such a grand harbour? It must have cost a large sum.'

'I can't say for that,' answered he; 'the monks have the credit of having carried out this bit of engineering. They did not pay their workmen a pound a week and find them, I daresay. It has always been the principal lion of Clanmorris; though whether the

worthy men were actuated by a love of their kind, or by a love of fish, I am unable to decide.'

'Infidels and Turks that you are,' said the Father with mock earnestness, 'you must always refuse to the holy men of my creed the poor meed of sincerity and earnestness. I tell you that in the days when this rude structure was built, and the evensong and matins rang from that ruin among the yew-trees (for it was undoubtedly a chapel, and part of the belfry can be traced), the Convent was almost the sole depository of light and knowledge intellectually, of social improvement and civil freedom. Here the peasant had sanctuary from the ignorant brutal nobles and gentry of the day, who were *your* ancestors, Maurice O'Grady. Here old manuscripts were preserved and copied, the true faith taught to the down-trodden savage serfs.'

'They had great times of it, Father O'Hara. There were no national schools then, no bothering inspectors, no boards of guardians. Sure, they might have made the work a little easier for you and me who come after them. But, me dear sir, you are out of order: the question before this House is, where shall we sail this blessed and wonderful day? Run her out, Patsy, and the rest of ye! Here's his Holiness going to America to be made a bishop of—they've heard of him, and the way he has converted you heathens, and they must and will have him for the Cherokees.'

'Sure there'd be no vartue in making good Christyeens of us, yer honour,' said the boatman he addressed—a bold-eyed fellow, with the hardy look which wrestling with storm and tempest ever imparts; 'av we were not rasonably wicked his riverence would be lost intirely, and be with never a diaoul to fight at all, at all.'

'Bedad! if we're not Christyeens, what are the boys

in Joyce's country? I wish ye seen them on a fair day, or at a patthern.'

'You're all nate boys, I make no doubt,' said the priest good-humouredly; 'there's worse in Australia, I daresay, though Mr. O'Grady won't have it. But now, where are we going to sail to? What do you say to Neilun-a-ri?'

'The very place,' said O'Grady. 'It's a long sail; but there's the old ruin for Rolf here to philosophise about, and we can have our lunch in peace, and come home before the westerly wind.'

CHAPTER XXX

WE had reached the seashore by a steep ravine, caused by a cleft in the limestone formation predominant in the district. Much winding through a thick undergrowth, the view was obstructed until all suddenly the ocean rose to view, glorious, far-stretching, and solemnly grand in its loneliness and desolation. Tremulous and silver-hued in the beams of the wintry sun lay the limitless plain of the rarely slumbering Atlantic. From eastward a ridge of purple mountains cast a warm shadow over the soft-hued deep. The peaked island that we were to visit rose like an azure cloud out of the bosom of the main. Wondrous was the calm beauty of the scene, in the rare colouring and tranquillity of the day. As we glided from the beach, with the faintest breeze that rendered oars unnecessary, the almost unearthly beauty of the surroundings extorted admiring comments from the whole party.

'You must have had this day packed up and sent

overland, Rolf,' said O'Grady, indolently dipping his hand in the water, as we lay dreaming in the stern. 'It never belonged to Connemara by right, eh, Father?'

'It is indeed a most lovely day,' said the priest, who had taken the tiller. 'The seasons are changing, or 'tis I that am getting old, for there are not half the fine days there used to be when I was a boy. Many a day have I sailed and fished in these very waters, and hunted on the shore yonder. I remember well the first hare I killed; it was round that point. I was a young boy then, and had borrowed a rusty duck-gun that had seen service many a year back, and been hid in a bog for half a year at a time. A fine Jack hare was sitting up and "washing his face" with his paws, as the gossoons say; I crawled up, and resting the ould piece of ordnance on a hillock, knocked him over and myself at the same time. Sure I thought my collar-bone was broke intirely.'

'Those were jolly days,' said Maurice; 'we were all young then—that's the rason the days are shorter and not so bright, summer or winter. Many a wake and fair I went to then, and was never so happy as when I could steal away among the country people, joining in their dances and sports, and drinking poteen whisky out of an egg-shell when glasses were scarce.'

'Was that the time that Molshie Oge—sure, she was the fine colleen intirely—carried yer honour over the Lurra ford, after the wake at Paudheen Rafferty's?' said Patsy, with an air of great simplicity.

'The same,' said Maurice, slightly confused; 'the fact was that this Paudheen, or little Pat Rafferty, was a rich ould miser, and his friends coming into his money, when he could hoard it no longer, had the greatest wake over him that ever was seen. I and Ned Athy's brother Fergus, with a few wild slips of lads, got

away to it, and between dancing with the country girls, and the whisky, and the general excitement, I was not altogether so clear in the head as I might have been; not quite up to taking delivery of a station, eh, Rolf? Well, one lot of the country people went off with us part of the way home, and all went well till we came to this brook, swollen with a mountain fresh. I was looking at it doubtfully, as the girls took off their shoes and stockings and marched boldly in, when this Mary Connor, or Molly Ogee, a fine strapping lass, stooped down and took me up, pick-a-back, as if I were a child. I was light enough then. We went along famously, the water a trifle over knee-deep, when just in the middle it occurred to me to bestow half-a-dozen kisses upon her plump cheek; my arms already round her neck, being conveniently placed for the operation.'

'How did she approve of the compliment?'

'I can't be sure whether she liked it or not,' said O'Grady cautiously, 'but the next moment I found myself upon the broad of my back in the Lurra, with the prospect of a wettish walk home and an inconveniently good story against me in the county for months after. Both expectations developed into certainties; indeed, I was laughed at so much that I really believe it led me to think of Australia.'

'Oh, fortunate and most benign Molly Ogee!' said I. 'But you're such a consistently lucky fellow, Maurice, that if you had gone to South America, like Jack Hamilton, or stayed at home, or enlisted in the Guards, you would have become a capitalist all the same. Some people can't help it.'

'See now,' interposed the priest, 'we're getting nearer to the island. We have the net with us. We shall be in good time for a haul, and what a broil we shall have.'

We reached the island, which rejoiced in a round tower, decayed, venerable, and of vast age; its very use and purpose a puzzle to antiquaries and patriotic historians.

A cavern also, deep and spacious compared to the size of the island, had formerly been the temporary abode of distressed royalty, and later on a convenient depôt for smuggled spirits. We set the boatmen to haul the net while we explored the recesses of the cave, and sharpened the appetite which the fresh breath of the ocean had commenced to awaken.

'Sure I remember the time,' said the priest, 'that no one would have gone rashly into the "Uaimh na ri" (the king's chamber) that we are now entering. Besides a stray ghost supposed to be handy, there was the chance of meeting a band of smugglers keeping hid for the next moonless night and a bold run.'

Gaily and pleasantly passed the day in rambling excursions. Towards evening we sailed calmly homewards, with a fair breeze filling the immense sheet of the weatherly craft, which could have told many a tale of heavy seas and winter gales in which larger boats had been glad to lie to. But for us the rippling wave bore no hint of the wrath of ocean—of wailing fisher-wives, or of brothers and sweethearts blithely leaving the cot by the lonely beach, to which they would return no more, or to be borne in with the seaweed mingled in their tangled hair.

As the sun faded out in the short light of a winter day, the glories of the earth, sea, and sky were painted in rich and ever-changing colours upon the fleeting cloud battalions which rose as if marshalled and ranked with unheard trumpet-calls in the clear pale light of eve. The mountains, robed in regal purple, flamed for a space in the golden fire of the dying sunset; the

lonely cliffs which lined the shore to eastward grew sombre and darksome of hue long before the soft gloom of twilight quenched the sunset tabard—'white and golden, crimson blue.' The shimmering ocean plain lay calm and softly tremulous as the stars, stealing out, wrote themselves in faint fire upon its bosom; while the hush of nature was deeply, almost terribly profound, as on the ice-bound fiords in that farthest north land, where winter reigns with rigid crown, and long-deserted ships drift weirdly with flapping sail and helmless course down lonely channels into a nameless sea.

'How wondrously beautiful!' said I at length, as we with one accord broke the long silence. 'There is the charm of the unearthly about this closing scene of our holiday. There is not a sound or sign of human habitation within ken; one might almost expect to see Othere's Arctic phenomenon, it has turned so freezingly cold.

> And through the darkening haze
> We saw the sullen blaze
> Of the red midnight sun.'

'I wonder what there'll be for dinner?' said the realistic Maurice. 'Isn't that the end of the Priory wharf, Patsey?'

'Sure your honour is right,' said Captain Patsey, ''tis many a wild night I seen about here. We'll be hauling her into the boathouse in twenty minutes.'

'Thank the gods!' I assented. 'Dinner won't be a remote fact when that ceremony is concluded. The acme of enjoyment is to be able to tire one's self reasonably, and then to reach home with a well-grounded conviction that the dinner and the appetite are equally sincere. But, badinage apart,' I continued, 'how oddly it often happens that amidst a day's enjoyment like this a sudden presentiment of evil shapes itself,

like a black "eidolon." Such a one is at my heart now.'

'Take a drop of whisky,' said Maurice; 'my flask isn't quite empty. Most of these things are material, eh, father?'

'And, you think, curable by the materials,' answered he laughingly. 'Who knows? Well, here we are! I feel, too, as if I had been out of the world for a holiday, and was going back to school.'

'By the powers,' said Maurice, surveying us with a comical sternness, 'for a couple of men that have seen something of life, ye possess a degree of sentiment that makes a hardened sinner like me feel ashamed of himself. However, as we are going over to Mount Blake to-morrow, I'll trust to sound claret and family society to effect a cure of my friend Rolf here.'

'Which I daresay will be found effectual,' I answered, making an effort to throw off my sudden gloom. 'My letters are awaiting me there. We shall have news from Bushland, Maurice. Let us trust it will be good.'

. . . . .

The next morning found us spinning along in O'Grady's buggy, having said good-bye to Father O'Hara, and left Maurice's improvements to develop themselves under the energetic superintendence of Johnnie Donnellan, who assured me that a year would see him outward bound, quite ready for another bout of cattle-droving, wire-fencing, dry seasons, ophthalmia, well-digging, money-making, and all the varied pains and pleasures of Riverina.

'There's some chance of going ahead out there, Mr. Boldrewood,' said the honest fellow as he gripped my hand at parting till every finger tingled again. 'In this old-fashioned country there's nothing to be done

but spend money in handfuls, and very little to show for it. The governor has a good bank account, or he couldn't stand it long. And then, my word! suppose one of these fellers was to take a pot shot at him. Only for the priest, I'm not too sure they wouldn't. Isn't it a rum start? Fancy any one sending a letter to old Bunter, or Thomson Brothers, to say their last hour was come! Ha! Wouldn't it be a lark?'

'You forget the bushrangers,' said I; 'they occasionally did something in that line, even in our favoured land.'

'Well, I suppose they did,' admitted he, scratching his head reflectively; 'but what was half-a-dozen men in about five hundred miles square? I never used to give 'em a thought. Besides, they fought pretty fair. But there's many a thousand of these chaps, and you're bound to be in their sight night and day. However, *we're* all right, thanks to Father O'Hara, and that's mostly what we've got to look to. Good-bye again, sir, and good luck all the way home.'

Our arrival at Mount Blake was the signal for an amount of grateful greeting which would have warranted supposition that we had been the survivors of a wreck. Mr. Blake's joy was not to be concealed or refined away. His reception was touching. With noble frankness he vowed they were all pining for my return, and that he, Dillon Blake, was going to have tempted the perils of Connemara, and stormed Maurice's castle, if I had stayed away another week.

'Sure we were all lost without ye, Boldrewood, me boy, and Maurice here; we've got used to see the pair of ye about the ould place. There's no denying the truth, it *was* mighty lonely without ye both; and as for the girls, Harriet hadn't spirit enough to contradict a milliner, and Isidora said——'

'I hope you'll allow me to tell Mr. Boldrewood what I said in my own way, papa,' interrupted that calm maiden, with a *soupçon* of haste rather unusual for her, 'and not put any nonsense into my mouth that may come into your head.'

'Tell him in your own way, darling,' said this model parent, in tones of subdued tenderness which would have raised his salary on the stage with the least discriminating manager; 'I've no doubt he'd rather have it from yourself.'

'Then, for fear Mr. Boldrewood and Mr. O'Grady should imagine that it was anything very dreadful, I had better confess once for all,' said she, with an arch look which gave her statuesque features that touch of expression and sparkle alone wanting for irresistible fascination, 'that I owned to Harriet that we were wretchedly dull and low, and that if the frost would go, and Mr. Boldrewood and Mr. O'Grady come back, that Mount Blake would be a more agreeable place.'

I looked a million of thanks, but O'Grady, unluckily, was not fully satisfied with his proud position as the *bienvenu*, and, desirous of confirmation, inquired, 'And what did Miss Harriet say?'

'That she didn't care if she never set eyes on Mr. O'Grady again,' broke in that young lady impetuously, 'and that she didn't know whether Mount Blake was more detestably dull in his absence or disagreeable in his presence.'

Maurice's total collapse was ludicrous to witness. I essayed to make peace, but Isidora, with more tact, reassured him.

'Don't believe her, Mr. O'Grady,' said she; 'I won't tell tales out of school, but I've a good mind to let you hear something she *did* say. There's the dinner-bell; perhaps she'll be more amiable when she's had some-

thing to eat. As for me, I am famished, and feel cross enough for anything.'

The countenance of our worthy host would have brightened the tone of an older and less malleable party. His jokes, his paternal advice, his chivalrous devotion to Mrs. Blake, the deep tenderness of his every word to his daughters, the general atmosphere of welcome, the slightly luxurious standard of the cuisine, noticeable after Maurice's bachelor housekeeping, all tended to the thawing of coldness and the interchange of deeper than ordinary confidences. The influence was contagious. Even the combative Harriet relaxed considerably, and, from the unremitting flow of Maurice's persuasive eloquence, I judged that an armistice had been agreed upon, which, unless the garrison was more than ordinarily *rusée*, might not impossibly finish, like other truces and temporisings, with capitulation.

For myself, I was not subjected by the fair Isidora to so severe an ordeal. Our converse had been amicable, sympathetic, and, as I fancied, more than ordinarily cordial. There was a frankness of tone combined with an occasional touch of emotion which I had imagined, but had never been so happy as to see realised, in the somewhat too unruffled serenity of the stately maiden. This slight but marked change was as enthralling as unexpected. After the ladies retired, I thought the decanters were urged around with an unslackened speed not usual with our host, who liked to linger over his wine lovingly. Then he proposed an adjournment to the drawing-room, almost anticipating our motion.

'Sure you mustn't stay gossiping with an ould twaddler like me, after being away ages and ages. I can hold my own with the womenkind mostly, but I'm doubtful of my position as a husband and father if we

sat too long this blessed night. In with ye, boys; I'm going to see Andy Doolan for five minutes; I believe ye know your way.'

We were quite up to the geography of the Mount Blake establishment, rambling and irregular as it was. And curiously, soon after our arrival in the drawing-room Mrs. Blake must have had an appointment with her housekeeper equally important and nearly as protracted as that of Mr. Blake with his half-steward, half-factotum, Andy Doolan. Before that respected lady returned to the drawing-room, I had a reasonable opportunity, of which I fully availed myself, to pour out my soul's long-imprisoned needs in the ear of the glorious dream-bride of my spirit; and, while watching the shifting colour pale and glow, I read my reward in one softened look from her wondrous eyes—felt the firm, sweet clasp of her snowy hand, and received distinct permission to confer upon the momentous question with her father, upon the thrice happy morrow yet to dawn upon me.

He returned, but in time to witness the departure of the lady part of the household, and, with a voice thick with emotion, to propose an immediate adjournment to the smoking-room.

Little passed in that snug sanctum beyond our usual careless talk, though it was evident that we stood on a more confidential footing than ordinary. But as we prepared to separate for the night, I told Mr. Blake that I hoped for a few minutes' conversation with him in the morning, upon a matter of great importance to me. He wrung my hand with emotion, and a look at once penetrating and yet of pleasant anticipation came into his face as he said:

'My dear boy, in the library, after breakfast, I shall be *quite* at your service.'

CHAPTER XXXI

I ROSE earlier than usual after a sleepless night, and strolled over to the stables, where I watched Jim brush the last speck of dust from the glossy skin of the Pirate, and half complete the toilette of Wanderer.

'I hope we're to have a day with the hounds soon, sir,' said my faithful retainer, 'or Pirate will be up to some of his old tricks. He is a deal above himself as it is; nearly got from under me yesterday as I was coming from the forge.'

'The frost has gone off now,' I said. 'I think we must find out where Sir Richard meets the day after to-morrow.'

'All right, sir,' he answered, with a gratified expression; 'perhaps you'll give Wanderer a turn next time. If the country is any way decent he won't be far off the front, if I know anything about it. He has a turn of speed that you don't often see off the flat. But, sir,' and here his face changed to a look of doubt, even depression, 'I want to have a word with you about myself. I've got into a scrape since you were away. I hope you'll look over it.'

'Confound it,' thought I, 'this comes of leaving one's property to take care of itself while one goes roaming over the country with friends, and priests, and such like. What can it be? Jim is sober to a fault, and as prudent as a Scotchman on his promotion. Or is he going to anticipate the interview in the library? By Jove! the old story, I suppose.'

'Well, Jim, who is she?'

'You've guessed it, sir,' returned my Master of the Horse, with a most rueful visage. 'Perhaps they told you. I'm sure I never thought I should took that way, above all people, but I've been and done it at last!'

'What is it? speak out, man,' I said, a little impatiently. 'What is all the mystery about?'

'Nothing very bad, sir,' he answered; 'though I'm afraid you'll be dead against me when I tell you. I'm engaged to be *married!* and how I'm to take her about with us, and do justice to the horses, I can't make out anyhow.'

'Is that all?' quoth I, in a reassuring tone. 'Mary Joyce, I suppose? Well, she's pretty enough to tempt a busier man. We'll see what's to be done when I get my letters. I suppose it's not to come off at once, eh?'

'Not so long as you want me, sir, you may be sure,' he said, looking ridiculously grateful for my toleration of his 'misfortune'—not fully aware, perhaps, of the 'fellow feeling' which 'makes us wondrous kind.' 'I always looked to stay with you, and go back to the old country again when your leave was out. I shouldn't have thought of it, only I got into the way of walking up to the well to see that looney didn't bother her again. And Mary is such an out-and-out stunner in the make and shape line—let alone having such a head on her—that I couldn't help one evening——'

'Telling her all about it, and persuading her to turn into a Cornstalk and Mrs. James Whitby at the same time? Well, Jim, there's no scarcity of example as to this particular folly, which may turn out a sensible spec after all. You have been a good servant, so I must send you out by long sea in charge of the horses and a few shorthorns to keep you employed. She won't mind waiting a bit, I suppose?'

'Wait, sir?' said Jim, his whole countenance beaming with joy; 'she'll wait seven years; blest if I don't think she'd let me off altogether sometimes, when she feels parting with the old people. She talks as if she was going to Africa, or the West Indies, instead of to something like a country.'

'But you don't want her to be quite so obliging as that, eh, Master James?'

'Well, no, sir,' answered he, with decision; and his old expression of perfect faith in his own resources came back to his features. 'She's the prettiest girl I ever saw yet, and about the best, I believe. But, if you'll keep me till you've done all you want, and then send us out, I'll work for you till the end of my life—stock-keeping, bullock-driving, farm work, or—I'd very nigh said shepherding—though I hate it like poison.'

'I won't want you for that particular occupation, Jim, for we go in for wire-fencing and boundary riders. But you may consider the matter settled. The young woman won't refuse to come out at the last minute, I hope, though? These Connemara people are tremendously home-loving, you know.'

'I think not, sir,' said the captured colonist. 'She'll boo-hoo for a week or two, there's no doubt. The men all do that hereabouts, let alone the women; but she'll come, my word, "for love is still the lord of all," as the feller said.'

Rounding off with this apposite quotation, which he delivered with an apologetically sentimental air, Jim broke into a popular melody, whistled with an unsuccessful attempt at nonchalance, and retreated to his stable, evidently desirous of closing the colloquy. I departed towards the house, musing upon this singular coincidence with my own act and deed.

The ladies did not appear at breakfast, nor at that

meal did I perform so respectably as usual, my early morning walk notwithstanding. Blake was aggressively cheerful, and led the way to Australian subjects, putting a stray question from time to time as to the ordinary pursuits and mode of life of landed proprietors in that country, and extracting information as to the titles by which they held their territories or estates. He seemed rather prejudiced in favour of freehold, and, for the first time in our acquaintance, spoke doubtfully of the apparently undefined tenure by which, as Crown tenants, we depended upon the Government of the day.

'Now, suppose, my dear boy,—I'm only putting a case, ye know,—that the Liberals, or Radicals, or whatever you call the infernal scoundrels that are always ready to interfere with the right of a gentleman to his own property, were to pass laws making ye pay a rack-rent, or turn out altogether, where would your profits be then?'

I tried to explain that, though such wild ideas had been occasionally heard of, no Government possible in our colony would sanction for a moment any wholesale spoliation of a powerful and profitable class of capitalists, as were the squatters of Australia.

'Maybe not, maybe not,' rejoined he; 'but it's myself that knows what the party of progress, as they call themselves, are capable of. Didn't they ruin our country here, with their Encumbered Estates Court, in the teeth of a loyal party that would have gone through fire and water for the Crown, just at the bidding of a few theorists? Disgracing the gentry in every county in the kingdom, just for a trifle of debt, which their great-grandfathers, maybe, had contracted!'

'Even if such a thing were to come to pass,' I *returned*—'and you would have to emigrate to judge *how im*possible it is—we have still our stock, of great

and increasing value, and a fair amount of freehold, though small, I grant you, in comparison with the leasehold proportion.'

'But what would you do with the stock without the land?' rejoined Blake, with a queer, shrewd twinkle in his eye. 'But sure, all these matters are Greek to me, as you say. Let's go and have a quiet talk in the library, as we call it, though, bedad, there's more fishing-tackle than books in the same room, except Andy Doolan's farm accounts.'

Here he put his arm into mine, and led me off with his usual air of easy jocoseness into that useful but not strictly literary apartment.

There arrived, he closed the door carefully, and, seating himself in an armchair by the fire, regarded me with affectionate interest. I have a strong fancy, in all interviews of moment, for coming to the point without any preliminary exercise of foils. 'The hour' being come, 'and the man' or woman, I had always objected to more time being consumed than was necessary for the pronunciation of '*En garde.*' So I crossed swords at once.

'Mr. Blake,' I said, standing up before him and looking him full in the face, 'I am here to ask for your daughter's hand. Isidora has empowered me to make the request. I am fully sensible——'

Here the worthy Dillon rose, and, grasping my hand, shook it with a warmth and energy truly parental.

'Me dear boy, Rolf,' said he, in tones of the deepest feeling, 'sure I'd have picked ye out of a country-side for the son of my heart. Didn't I think so the first time I ever set eyes on ye? I'm a proud man this day—and, but for the thought of me dear girl laving the home of her forefathers, and going to the other side of the world, I'd say, Now let me die in peace! As a

father, and a fond one, I feel all this, *but* as a man of the world, Rolf, me boy——'

'Confound this *but*,' thought I; 'now it's coming, his real play—has he been finessing up to this card?' A slight remembrance of the warnings I had received passed through my brain, as he resumed, wiping his eyes and clearing his voice:

'As a man of the world, me dear fellow, and the guardian of me dear girls, that never felt the first desire ungratified, I feel that I am bound to secure a provision in moderation — in moderation, understand me, me dear fellow—in case of any change of prospects, and so on, when you're far away from Mount Blake, and she'll be, in a sort of way, among strangers.'

Here my future parent paused and looked at me, as if bespeaking my compassion for his lavishly generous nature in conflict with the hard necessity of his position.

'I acknowledge freely,' I answered, 'the propriety of your suggestion. I had hoped to have made the offer of a settlement, though we Australians are not fond of locking up available capital at three per cent; and I shall be too happy to settle a sum upon Isidora, equal to anything you may choose to name — any reasonable sum, upon the dear girl. I am not, of course, aware of the amount of her dower.'

'She should have a rent-charge upon the ould place, with all the veins of my heart. Harriet and she would have it between them at my death. There's no son to inherit the lands that Manus Blake won with the strong hand when the De Burgo was lord of every acre between this and the Shannon. But' (now this *but* was of a different tone and character from the first ominous monosyllable) 'circumstances will prevent me

from doing that same for the present, and ye must wait for ould Dillon's death, I'm afraid, before ye get anything out of the estate that's been hundreds of years in the family.'

'I am totally indifferent,' I answered, 'to Isidora's present or probable fortune, and hope you may see us all out, my dear sir; but what do you wish me to do in the settlement way? let us finish it at once.'

'Right, me dear boy, right. Settle it at once, bedad; it's a settled thing anyway, and it's proud I am. Sit down there, in the big chair opposite. I'm tired of standing myself. Well, now that we're comfortable, I'll name the sum, and I think you'll not say it is a penny too much for Isidora Blake to fall back on in a rainy day; life's uncertain, ye know, and in the colonies——'

'Hang the colonies!' said I, somewhat impatiently; 'that is, excuse me, my dear sir, but let us have an understanding about the sum you propose, and I am ready to fulfil my part if possible.'

'Well, then, me dear fellow, sure I understand your eagerness. I know the feeling myself, and it's creditable to you. I'd say at a word twenty thousand pounds, to be conveyed to trustees, for her sole benefit, either in cash or secured upon one of your estates. I'd prefer freehold land and a first mortgage, of course. We don't like second ones in this country, ha! ha!'

The old boy rattled all this off as glibly as if he had been asking one to come and have some trout-fishing, and mentioning how many he had killed last week. He packed all the minor arrangements after the trifling sum named into the smallest compass, in or out of parchment, that freehold land, trustees, and first mortgages ever figured in—rounding off with his cheery laugh, with which his shrewd eyes were not in

accordance, and lolling back in his chair, as if my assent were the most perfect matter of course.

I was slightly surprised, though not altogether unprepared for the demand. I thought the genial guardian of his darling daughter's comfort and happiness might have himself arranged some slight provision against the narrow circumstances he so dreaded.

The proposed inconsiderable deduction from his son-in-law's working capital would thus have appeared in the treaty with a better grace. Of course I intended to assent to his proposition. But I could not help thinking that in case of a hard season or two, a fall in the price of wool, or any of the malign cycles which vary the uniform prosperity of Australia, that twenty thousand pounds irrevocably locked up, and yielding at most but eight hundred or a thousand a year, would be viewed by me in after-years, possibly even by Isidora, as partaking less of safety than of sacrifice. Besides, was it fair towards my father, largely tolerant as he had always been of expense incurred during my travels, to write off such a sum to the reserve fund from the capital of Boldrewood and Sons? I certainly had private property, upon which money could easily be raised. Still, I should none the less contract the fund upon which, for our joint advantage, we might have to draw in a day of need.

Restraining my first impulse, therefore, of unconditional assent, as the half-formed shapes of these ideas flashed rapidly through my brain, I answered that I was not quite prepared for an immediate settlement to that amount; that it exceeded the sum I had thought of, but that I could tell him definitely after lunch.

'Quite right, me boy,' cried he, with warmest approbation expressed in every feature, 'take time to consider; it shows ye know what you're talking about.

Sure I like ye all the better for it, and now, off with ye! I know ye're dying for a talk and a look. I've some orders to give on the farm.'

So, with a paternal and avuncular pressure of the hand, amalgamated as it were, off strode my worthy parent *in posse*, while I found myself instinctively tending towards a certain walk in the shrubbery, where once more my heart stirred and glowed as I caught sight of the faultless form of my soul's idol.

'What a conference you must have been having with papa in the library,' said she, turning her eyes, half mirthfully, half wistfully, towards me; 'I thought you were never coming; I have been walking up and down till I felt like the picture of "the Lady expecting an Inconstant."'

'That could never happen to you,' I said.

'Well, I really think not,' she answered with mock seriousness. 'I have talents in that line myself, and I should take care to be the *first* to exercise it.'

'Don't say that, even in joke,' cried I; 'I like not the omen, and I am the last person in the world who could endure a shade of uncertainty. Say you don't mean it,' pursued I, as again the unaccountable presentiment, which had assailed me at Clanmorris, swept like a death-shadow over my spirit. 'Is it not between us for ever and for ever, love?—let me swear it on this fairy hand.'

'Nonsense,' said she, breaking from me and dancing up the walk over the withered leaves, 'you're awfully exacting; still "I'll see what I can do, my love," as the song says, "I'll see what I can do."'

I had taken time for the consideration of Blake's proposition, rather as a matter of habit in decisions of importance than with any idea of refusal. For anything that would have imperilled my chance of pos-

sessing that fair proud face, the haunting charms of which had troubled my dreams since my first sight of them, I was too deeply enthralled. So I sauntered past the door of the fateful apartment in the afternoon, and ascertaining that the old man was enjoying a doze in his favourite armchair, stood leaning in the entrance until he should arouse himself.

He did so shortly, and with an audible stretching and yawning threw off the light slumber, and walking to an opposite window looked out upon the shrubbery. It was a gloomy afternoon; the stillness of the preceding days had given way to the chill and gusty weather that boded a storm. The withered leaves swirled in the eddies of the gathering blast. The naked trees rocked shudderingly as the wind gained power. I thought idly of the far different aspect of the summer-land I had quitted, and retained my lounging attitude half unconsciously.

'There is no winter in my soul,' thought I, 'however he may rave on this bleak shore of the Atlantic. Let me tell the old man that he may make his mind easy about the sum which has commended itself to his parental imagination, and let me feel that my darling is my promised bride before this stormy eve shall darken.'

Before I had time to move in ratification of this laudable resolution, a door opened on the farther side of the apartment, and the stately figure of Isidora appeared. She stood with one hand upon it and looked into the room as if in search of some one. 'She thinks the affair is all over, and is come to ask her father's blessing,' thought I. I could not deny myself the luxury of watching her for a moment unobserved, as she stood with unconscious grace, at the entrance of the darksome room, while a sudden gleam from the wintry sun

fell upon her face and form, illumining her wondrous beauty, and enabling me to mark every change of expression. As she caught sight of Blake, who had turned his back to me, and looked wonderingly at her, I was amazed, as she spoke, to note the transition to a hard keen look in her face, which reminded me unpleasantly of her father's in its least pleasing aspect.

'I want you to tell me, father, without any nonsensical delay, whether he will agree to settle the twenty thousand?'

As the words, hateful in themselves—with death in every syllable to the great host of my poet-dreams—issued from her lips, the clear intonation sounded almost harshly in my astonished ear. It was the knell of hope, love, fancy, 'all except mere breath.' A half-sigh escaped from my lips as I reeled a step forward. Our eyes met for one moment. In my face was written, doubtless, the sudden cruelty of a stroke which blanches the features and stops the currents of the heart. With swiftly lowered eyes, she closed the door abruptly and withdrew. Blake turned with a puzzled look, and seeing me, advanced, with a feeble attempt at his old confident manner. He was not certain of the moment of my entrance to the room, and consequently half hoped that I had not fully heard the fatal inquiry.

'By the powers, but you gave me a quare start! Am I awake at all, at all? Sure I'm getting too old for these long walks—and that fellow, Andy Doolan, tramping the legs off me following him over the farm this morning. Was that Isidora that came looking in at the door yonder, or Harriet?'

CHAPTER XXXII

'SIR!' said I, facing him with a set look that *he* had never seen in my face before, 'I have unfortunately seen and heard Miss Blake but too distinctly. I wish to God I had not done so. But her words have enlightened me as to her true feelings only too clearly. Mine from this hour are completely changed. I beg to withdraw my proposal for the honour of her hand. I thank you for your hospitality, of which I regret I cannot further avail myself.'

The old man seemed as though he could scarcely credit his senses. His ordinary self-possession entirely deserted him, and he kept on muttering something about its 'all being a mistake—all a mistake. Isidora would explain everything. It was his fault—his fault only. He had been chattering about these d—d settlements, that were lawyers' work, and not fit for gentlemen to touch, bedad!'

He looked piteously at me as he spoke, and my heart softened at the thought that genuine love for his daughter had been the principal reason for his tenacious policy as to settlements. I forgave him for acting merely according to his instincts, which, under an assumed generosity, were grasping and sordid. But 'write me down (I told myself) the veriest dupe that ever followed the lure of a heartless coquette, cringed for a smile, and fawned spaniel-like on the hand that smote him, if I forgive *her!* No!—dead were every feeling of manhood if I suffered myself to be again *flattered into* captivity, a willing slave to mere soulless

form, to beauty unredeemed by the tender heart of loving womanhood—to feel myself valued at a price, and to know my market value to a fraction—that price—ha! ha!—twenty thousand pounds!'

My mind was made up, my decision unalterably fixed. Racked with contending feelings, agonised with the loss of all that I had but an hour since held safe in my possession, I yet preserved an outward appearance of calmness. Such had been my early habitude and training, amid the storms and conflicts of life. They did not fail me now.

Bidding Jim follow with my effects, I had Wanderer saddled and rode into Tuam, previously giving this letter into the hands of Miss Blake's personal attendant. Calm as I looked, I could hardly hold the pen or render the writing legible.

'Not less to himself than to the once beloved Isidora Blake does Rolf Boldrewood deem it due to trace these hurried lines to her whom he would have shielded from the ills of life with his heart's best blood. Her cold and cruel words—hers alone—laid low the enchanted palace in which he already saw the dream-princess of his soul enshrined. They transformed the man, loved for himself alone, into an appendage to a marriage settlement.

'Shrinking from the torture-chamber of a loveless union, she must pardon his flight from the witchery of her charms, while yet a shred of self-respect remains to him. Long will it be ere his heart ceases to throb at the sound of her name, and may she well believe that this trembling hand well-nigh refuses to form the words "farewell for ever."'

Having established myself at the military barracks, in the quarters of the Colonel, an old acquaintance, I made such confidence as was necessary to that experienced dragoon, who, not unused to unexpected orders to march, betrayed no surprise, and promised to 'act' for me in case of necessity arising either from the chief or the cadets of the house of Blake.

was received at mess with acclamation, where the light-hearted warriors, beyond the casual inquiries as to what hounds I proposed hunting with in England, with their usual good-breeding made no reference to my sudden change of plan. Nothing is more soothing to the ruffled frame of mind in which a man occasionally finds himself, than the calmly incurious habit of club life or of those social coteries of similar cosmopolitan experience such as I now entered. With generally accurate information as to the latest adventure of any guest or comrade, neither allusion, question, nor condolence is suffered to mar that portion of the aggregate comfort to which each individual is held to be sacredly entitled.

Each man's affairs are believed to be his own peculiar care. All things are taken for granted, unless explanation be proffered. And whether the recent or ancient comrade have lost his fortune, his family, a lady-love *in esse*, or a title *in posse*, unless his temper follows suit, he glides into his position unquestioned and unmolested, as though he had tasted bread and salt in the tent of an Arab Sheikh.

I was then only aware, by a more carefully considerate reception on all sides, or by the absence of all reference to Mount Blake and its inhabitants, that my situation was guessed at. We talked over the forthcoming steeplechase of Punchestown, the hunting season in England, the last Castle ball, the dulness of country quarters, the wonderful fishing in the neighbourhood, the last election with its accompanying brickbats, and the steadiness of the regiment under fire on that occasion. But no allusion was made to Blake's humour, the girls' good looks, or even Maurice O'Grady's evident devotion to Miss Harriet. We closed the evening after sitting an hour later than

usual, and a steady circulation of the wine-cup. Otherwise, as far as I was concerned, I might have been joining the mess after a cricket-match, or before a review, so entirely was any special reason for my visit ignored.

Jim arrived next morning with his horses, and took up his residence at one of the hotels where the stabling was of a description to satisfy his exacting taste. As for me, I commenced to suffer, now that the excitement of the moment was over, the slower agonies which succeed the sharp thrill of the sword-stroke, the dull jar of a bullet-wound. How utterly dark and cheerless seemed life! How vain all occupation! How futile all human aims and ends! The career of manhood! The unshared facts of existence! Dead lay hope, fancy, love. But yesterday, living, breathing, fragrant realities; to-day, pale dishonoured corpses, fitted but for hurried, unseemly burial, denied alike the rites of lingering, passionate grief, the tears of memory, the prayers of faith! And I, a rudderless bark, with shattered sail and ghostly crew, drifting on a shoreless deep, heedless of tempest or of billow! Outwardly calm, I was the prey of anguish, well-nigh unendurable, as I reviewed my conduct, and thought how the catastrophe which had slain my youth might have been spared.

'Better,' thought I, 'to have passed on in that typical clamour of the bridal procession which stills the whisper of distrust, as other men have done, than have stretched myself on this rack—for what? For what? Because a woman was—a woman,' I cried, in bitter irony; 'because I had proved in my own precious person, forsooth, what the garnered experience of ages, of all classes, all lands, languages, and societies, had declared. Who was I that I was to have allotted to

me the treasure which never existed, perchance, but in the day-dreams of ignorant youth, the fantasy of poets and other impostors?'

In my agony and blindness I felt as if I thirsted to drag down the pillars of the temple—to me, hitherto, so solid and abiding in glory—to deny faith, to insult truth, to question even the Supreme Justice. Like him of old, I was tempted, by a false and mocking spirit, to curse God and die!

I do myself the justice to say that I took my punishment without token of outward discomposure. The training of the modern school of manners necessitates so much at least. None the less mordantly did the demons of baffled passion, of despair and ruined love, rend my heart and ravage every chamber of my inmost being.

Reckless and despoiled, as I stood confessed, I waited yet another week in response to a rule of the unwritten code of honour. I thirsted, indeed, for an opportunity of offering myself a sacrifice by meeting in fair field any one of the numerous family of the Blakes who might choose to constitute himself the champion of the family honour.

'But none answered.' Day after day passed. I rode, and lounged, smoked, and played billiards with the gallant 99th; was regular at the nightly whist-table, and took my turn at racquets. Still no knight or squire from the enchanted Castle came with cartel or gauntlet.

One morning O'Grady was announced. He had gone off on one of his flying business journeys on the very day of my disaster, thinking all things happily arranged. Thunderstruck at the intelligence which he had gathered on his return, he had hurried off to see *me once more*. As he entered the room our eyes met

for one moment—his full of wistful inquiry, mine sternly sad with the sorrow of despair. He rushed up to me, and taking both hands in his own, essayed to speak. When his voice came it was broken and changed.

'Rolf, old man,' he said, 'me dear boy, for the love of God tell me all about it. Can nothing be done? Sure, there *must* be some infernal mistake. Blake is half mad about it. Cursing you one moment, himself the next, and all the women in the world after that. Can't anything be done? I'd give my heart's blood to put things as they were.'

'Nothing *can* be done, my dear Maurice,' I answered slowly and in measured tones, which even in my own ears sounded strangely dull and harsh. 'The past can never be restored, even if I were weak enough to desire it, which I do not, though it wrings my very soul even now to declare it. Take it, that I deceived myself, or that she—I cannot speak her name—held the man lightly to whom she pledged her troth, but clung eagerly to his gold—pshaw! why talk of it? It is over—all over for ever—and we are a thousand leagues apart.'

'But, me dear boy, don't think I want to excuse her—if she said what they say; but sure, ye were a trifle hasty. Women often say what they don't mane; so do we now and then; and after all that's past and gone, d'ye think ye mightn't have given her a chance of recanting? Sure, she likes you still—I know that.'

'My old and tried friend,' I made answer, as O'Grady fixed his eyes eagerly upon my face, his honest features working with emotion, 'do you not think that my own heart is seconding every word you say? But I *saw* and *heard* what can never be effaced

from my mind. She is now to me another woman—Isidora Blake's presentment is gone for ever, and in her stead I see a form which inspires endless regret, but love never more, as long as the earth holds us twain.'

'It is indeed all over,' he said, with a half-sigh. 'I know you too well to think of changing your decision. Confound her meddling folly that wouldn't let well alone! Sure she might have trusted ould Dillon for that much, anyhow. She——'

'Don't say a word against her, Maurice; we have parted, and for ever—but neither I, nor any man in my presence, will ever treat with disrespect the name that once was so dear, so sacred. I know you don't mean to be hard on her.'

'But I do,' quoth he impulsively. 'I take her part so far, and maybe I'll have better rason soon; but how could she be so infernally short-sighted as to kick down the best chance of happiness she'll ever have—the honest love of a man and a good fellow all round like yourself, me dear boy—I say it to your face—for the sake of a dirty thousand or two, more or less, and she sure of half as much a year, if wool keeps up, and the dry weather keeps off? But she's a could, ambitious, hard-hearted——'

'Must *we* quarrel over this miserable business, Maurice, after all the pleasant old days?' said I, 'as we assuredly shall, if you won't stop. Come, let us dine together for the last time to-night, for a while at all events. I shall be off to England to-morrow, as there is no sufficient reason for remaining longer.'

'No rason in life—Dillon is too old to "blaze," and it's getting out of fashion nowadays. Jack Blake is *mighty savage*, but not with *you*. There was a wild

squireen of a chap, a far-away cousin, who had a mind to parade ye, for the honour of Galway?'

'And why did he not?' I asked, with a tinge of the old sullen spirit returning; 'I was stopping in this cursed slow place for no other reason.'

'Well,' said O'Grady, with a quiet smile, 'I told him that I claimed the first right as Harriet Blake's promised husband (which I am, God bless her!) to hold you to account, if I thought fit; and that any man that interfered with my duty must answer it to me. So he heard rason.'

I wrung his hand silently as he spoke. He knew well that I rejoiced in the crowning of his hopes.

'I knew it; I knew it, me boy! Sure I didn't intend to let it out just now. How about this said dinner?—all embassy business is dry work.'

We dined at one of the old-fashioned but snug inns, and had our last talk together. Next morning saw us parting at the railway terminus, where I bade a long farewell to the West, and to the hopes which had made so dear a part of my life since the hour that I first crossed the Shannon.

As the train approached Athenry, my dulled senses, careless as they were to outward impressions at the time, made me aware of a strange clamour, dominating all other sounds and increasing in volume and intensity as we neared, with slackened speed, the stopping-place. Was there a town being sacked, and were these the cries of the wounded, or of their wives and daughters, in the grasp of a ruffian soldiery? Were half-a-dozen 'townlands' being evicted simultaneously by ruthless landlords and their more stony-hearted agents?

Oliver Cromwell was dead, his Ironsides had sung their last battle-psalm centuries since, or history had suffered more falsification than even in this philo-

sophising age it is the fashion to compose, so that the indiscriminate 'putting to the sword' which followed the siege of Drogheda, or any similar 'hewing in pieces' of the Amalekite Irishry, could hardly be then and there enacting. Not that I cared particularly just then, I am ashamed to say.

As these thoughts arose, with dreamy indistinctness, I was almost fully awakened by the eager tones of a damsel in the same compartment, who, with her head stretched out of the window, exclaimed, 'Oh! listen to them roarin'.'

'Wombwell's Menagerie?' I inquired languidly, 'or an escaped lunatic asylum "in full blast"? *Does* any one know what the confounded row is about?'

''Tis the emigrants, sir, about to take the train to Liverpool,' said a quiet-looking man near me; 'and 'tis cryin' they are at laving their people, the crathurs, and why wouldn't they?'

Appeased by this information, I examined the assembled crowd as the train drew up to the platform, and comprehended the situation. A large party of the reluctant exiles were huddled on the approaches, escorted by at least four times the number of sympathisers. Nearly every man, woman, and child in the great crowd was not only weeping profusely, but 'crying aloud' in the most literal sense. Wailings, moanings, bitter cries, shrieks, and what the young woman before-mentioned called 'bawling,' were incessant; and while the difficult process of getting them into third-class carriages was transacting, fond embraces and agonising farewells went on ceaselessly.

'Queer start, ain't it, sir?' said Jim, who was stretching his legs on the platform, and regarding this manifestation with a critical air. 'Blest if I ever seen *as much* kissin' and regular good, first-chop cryin'

done in the time; one would think all these chaps was goin' away to be hanged, or transported, or something. Dreadful soft-hearted they must be, muggin' one another like that! I'd like 'em to see that great galoot there (indicating an osculating Damon) after he's been a year or two away, most likely with a "full share hat," a California sash, and as much notion of huggin' any one but a pretty gal as a shepherd has of kissin' the ration-carrier!'

'Their feelings do them honour, Jim,' said I, 'though a trifle unrestrained. You hardened Cornstalks haven't got any to signify, I suppose, or keep them stowed away, like passengers' luggage, marked "not wanted on the voyage."'

'That's more like it, sir,' quoth Mr. Whitby approvingly. 'Dessay we have 'em like other people at the proper time—but all this boo-hoo-in' like a lot of cows round a weaning paddock ain't quite the English style, or the Sydney-side way either. Well—it's "all aboard" at last.'

This last expression was elicited by the fact of the last of the emigrants being hustled into the car by the impatient guards, while as we sped away the steam whistle was partially overpowered by the shrieks of the bereaved host.

Sinking back into the state of collapse from which I had been partially aroused by the serio-comic incident, I remembered little more until I found myself in Dublin.

'Any one for the night mail?' inquired the guard. 'Steamer starts in twenty minutes.'

'What's the night like?' I asked.

'Head wind, and the divil's own say on,' quoth the friendly official.

'The very thing!' I answered, somewhat to his

astonishment. 'Get out my luggage and a car, there's a good fellow. Jim, you can come on in the morning. I shall be at Chester.'

We reached the pier in a description of weather apparently compounded in equal proportions of wind, sleet, thunder and lightning, with a suspicion, deepening to certainty, as we scented the salt water, of a mighty tempest. To these antagonistic, not to say malign influences I was insensible, save for a momentary sensation of sullen content at meeting difficulty akin to danger, as the dark hull of the steamer rose, from time to time, strangely high when lifted by the enormous waves that even now menaced the pier. But few passengers crossed its slippery stones that night.

In a few minutes after I touched the deck the mails were put on board, the harsh note of the steam whistle sounded as if in challenge to a more than ordinarily furious gust, while fronting the foaming, heaving waters, unscared by 'darkness and the unknown deep,' the mail-boat steamed steadily outward.

'You're not long ashore, sir,' said the grizzled hard-weather salt, whom the boat called captain, as we stood together, encased in oilskin and smoking the sympathetic cigar, 'or you wouldn't choose the deck on a night like this.'

'I have been on blue water lately,' I said. 'I suppose you never stop for weather on this line?'

'Not if it blew the yards out of the bolt-ropes—if we had yards, that is—or the funnel into the stern cabin. But there *is* a trifle of risk in thick weather, with a gale like this.'

'I can imagine it easily,' I answered, gazing mechanically at the dim, desolate deep, with so many a league of mountain billow, foaming, hissing, rolling, *glimmering* — an illimitable death-plain before and

around us, looking at the hell-black night, feeling the frozen blast, hearing the sighing, groaning, shuddering sounds with which the stout boat all but humanly made answer to the giddy liftings, the awful, abysmal drops, the crashing blows, in her onward course.

A started plate where every joint and beam seemed strained to its utmost capacity, an over-hot partition near that thrice-heated furnace, which glowed luridly in its narrow cage—and we lay helpless between two deaths! It was impossible to say that the element of risk was altogether absent. But as I held careless converse with the skipper, and marked his steady gaze into the stormy night, or walked forward to join the drenched pair of look-out seamen at the bows, the icy breath of the blast, the blinding sleet, the roar of the billows, the bursting surges, which ever and anon swept hissing over the decks—all tended to brace my nerves, and to still the intolerable torment, the dull ceaseless ache, in my inmost heart. Yet as we struggled into the Holyhead pier, I laughed, startling myself, at some sailor jest.

'By George, sir,' said the skipper, 'you are a born sailor! I'd make you second mate if I was master of the clipper ship I once sailed.'

'I don't know that I shall always be so fond of the sea,' I replied; 'it suits me now.'

CHAPTER XXXIII

BABYLONIA once more! In the full tide of the world's wealth, show, luxury; in the city where so large a

proportion of the world's great fortunes is expended; in the heart-region of that mighty race, the pulsations of which in valour, freedom, trade, and law are felt to the extremities of the earth's surface. In the solitude of its stranger millions it pleased me to halt and loiter, like a war-worn stranger with an alien tribe, until my spirits recovered somewhat of the calmness of old days.

Among other aimless strolls and lounges in London I wandered up to 'Tattersall's' occasionally, enjoying the sight of the batches of fine horses, which for all sorts of reasons passed from time to time under the inevitable hammer.

I had grown familiar with horses sold because their master 'was ordered abroad,' also with those 'the property of a gentleman having no further use for them.' I knew by sight the 'large handsome brougham horse,' steady, staunch, and with an air of unquestionable respectability about him; also that useful but rare, too rare, equine combination, 'good in saddle and harness, and *has* carried a lady.'

I have always had a partiality for the society of 'horsey' men, when the *laissez aller* impulse is not to be controlled. They possess much tact, and are not garrulous as a rule. They know whom to tempt with romantic descriptions of gorgeous steeds at impossible prices. They know at a glance whom to cease from troubling. I was recognised by instinctive perception as free of the guild, and passed, repassed, lounged, noted, and listened to the echoes of the great Houyhnhnm world unmolested.

On one sale day I attended, accompanied by Jim, for a special purpose. Many good lots were to be sold, and among them some horses of a particular strain of blood, which I was anxious to secure for our Australian *stud.*

Several were being moved off, preparatory to the great attraction of the day, and among them a small stud of hunters, 'the property of a gentleman who had no further use for them'—the regulation reason, of course. But the auctioneer went on to state that the explanation was literally true, as the late owner had unluckily broken his neck, and so gone to a country where hunting was unknown. He could not, certainly, take his horses with him.

As they walked out, I saw Jim's face change expression suddenly. With eager step he was beside me, and, in a hurried whisper, said:

'See the grey horse, sir, with the neck scar, and a *brand* on him? That's him. That's *Emerald!*'

'Quite sure?' said I.

'Know his head, sir, his ears, his tail, the scar on his neck, the brand, the way he has of pawing; know him?—better than I do my prayers.'

'Then bid for him,' said I, 'and *buy* him when he's put up.'

'Oh, Lord! sir, it's too good to be true; as luck would have it, he don't look over well; not that it matters—his legs are right, and condition makes no difference to *him*, one way or the other.'

The lot was soon up, the auctioneer declining to satisfy the public curiosity as to which horse had caused the sudden removal of the late proprietor. Emerald may have got the credit of it. Whether so or otherwise, unknown and unpriced, he was knocked down to Jim for seventy guineas.

'Mr. Boldrewood!' shouted Jim, wild with delight, as the auctioneer mildly inquired his name, and forthwith threw his arms round the horse's neck, and danced a lively measure, much to the astonishment of the bystanders. 'Let's get him away, sir, where I can have a

good quiet look at him,' said the ordinarily calm James. 'I feel as if I should smother, and me thinking we might miss him, or he be bought in after all.'

'Take him home, then,' said I, after a brief colloquy with the wielder of the hammer. 'I must have a good look at him too. If there's time to get him decently fit, and he is as good as you say, we'll give him a fly for the Liverpool Grand National, for the honour of Australia.'

Upon a more leisurely inspection, pursued under a running commentary from Jim, which comprehended a detailed account of Emerald's various feats, 'on the flat' as well as 'over the sticks,' coupled with fragmentary adjurations to look at his shoulders, his arms, his hocks, his back, his quarters,—indeed, every square inch of his shapely carcass,—I was fully in accord with Mr. Whitby's opinion as to our having come into possession of a very rare specimen of the ancient and noble equine race.

The horse at which I gazed was a true representative of that sub-variety of the breed which might with propriety be termed the Australian Arab. Claiming kindred on the female side with the best racing English families, in his veins flowed, from sire and grandsire, the purest Eastern blood—that of those desert coursers which with tireless speed had spurned the desert sands from the days of the Ishmaelite Sheikhs to those comparatively modern times of the Hegira and the unbartered studs of the Nejed and the Aneyzah.

Reared in a land of which the fierce suns and burning breezes, the wide plains and scant watercourses, but too closely simulate the climatic conditions of the home of the steed royal, the Austral Arab has developed qualities and performed feats of speed and endurance *not inferior* to those of the ancientest land. And while

he yields not a jot of the fire, the elasticity, the deathless courage of the battle-steeds of a thousand generations, he exhibits the height and frame of the charger which bears up the large limbs of an Anglo-Saxon rider.

Those men who have been lifelong lovers of the horse—as a charger, as a saddle-horse, as a hunter—tell you that there is no living steed that, in certain qualities and points of formation, equals the Arab and his direct descendants. The qualities are those of speed, stoutness, a certain latent rather than apparent energy, added to the rare courage which struggles, calm yet glowing, to the very death, undiminished by fatigue, famine, danger, or distance.

The points of formation were all inherited by the horse I shall essay to describe; the qualities he had been proved to possess.

Emerald was not large, as English horses are judged, being in height about fifteen hands two inches, though from his carriage he always gave spectators the idea of a taller horse. His colour was that flecked grey which has obtained the familiar sobriquet of 'flea-bitten.' His head was small, the delicate muzzle in contrast with the broad frontlet and well-developed jaw; while his large, prominent, mild eye gave an air of aristocratic serenity to his whole bearing. The neck was beautifully arched and delicately joined to the head. Then his shoulders, oblique and muscular, lying back at an unusual angle, guaranteed the fullest freedom of action, combined with a stag-like security of footfall. With the back 'just enough of it to carry a saddle,' as Jim averred, and a loin absolutely perfect, he united a beautifully sprung rib, which indeed was one of his peculiar characteristics. Without any great breadth of hip, or appearance of massiveness in the quarter, the muscularity was great. His croup had the aristocratic line

peculiar to Arabs, while his thighs, gaskins, and hocks afforded promise of any amount of strength or speed that might be required. Like the horse Abdjar, the steed of Antar in the Arabic legend, 'his legs were as steel, and his hoofs as hammered iron.'

'He's got a knock or two,—he can't be off that, all the sojerin' he's had, and the hurdlin' and steeplin', and racin' and huntin', and sea and land work,—but his legs would wear out two or three horses. You couldn't hurt them unless you took a tomahawk. He's pretty hard now, and I'll have him "as fit as a fiddle" by Illingford. I suppose you could waste down to eleven stone, or eleven half, sir?'

'I think I can, Jim,' I answered, not caring to tell him, however, that the 'wasting' process had set in, and that I should have less difficulty than I ever had before in diminishing tissue to the required standard.

I had received my letters from the Chase. The first was from my uncle, who wondered that I had not run down to see them ere this—that Gwen and Githa were looking out for me daily. Moreover, that Harold and the Major, who had returned from India, were inclined to be jealous of the ceaseless interest in my movements displayed by the girls, and that I must lose no time, if I wished to preserve the household from family dissension.

'So come down at once, my boy,' concluded the old man's letter, 'and let us see how the horses look after the Irish stone walls.'

In a somewhat different hand was the following missive:—

MY DEAR OLD ROLF—What are you moping yourself in that miserable, smoky London for, which I know you don't enjoy, *when you* might be having some of the best hunting here, they *all say, that* has been known for years? Not to mention that

your affectionate relatives are foolish enough to want to see you again ever so much. Even Githa, who *ought* not to wish for anything now, aggravates the Major by wondering continually when you are coming. Harold arrived a couple of months ago. He is a tremendous swell, like all Indians, and his manner is a little cold, just at first, you know, but there is the same kind old heart underneath. He is thought the most 'bruising' rider with our hounds, and he is ever so much lighter than you; so, sir, you will have to 'ride for your country like Valentine Maher.' The Major is charming. It is quite delightful to see how happy Githa looks—dear old thing! He has had a good part of his beauty carried away by a grape-shot; but she says he is all the handsomer for it, in her eyes. We have been praising your horses, and your groom, and generally doing battle for the colonies, until Harold says: 'Can no one ride, or shoot, or do anything decently except a Waler?' So you must come and put yourself *en evidence* for the sake of our credit. Come down this moment, sir, do you hear? I want you to tell me *all* about Ireland, and don't further try the patience of—Your loving cousin, GWENDOLINE BOLDREWOOD.

P.S.—Isn't it an awfully long name? I used to sign myself G., until it was taken for Georgiana, which I *hate*.

I was not in a frame of mind favourable to letter-writing, so I telegraphed to my uncle, 'Down on Saturday,' and made ready for returning to my English home, and the kind hearts where I was secure of sympathy as deep and true as I well knew it would be delicate and unobtrusive.

The afternoon on which I departed for the Chase was calm, with the soft neutral tints which mark the northern winter day, however free from storm, in strong contrast to the clear hues and brighter sun of the Austral mid-winter. The low grey sky, the leafless woodland, the saturated meadow, the tranced repose of the whole landscape, spoke of a clime where the Snow Giants of the Sagas still hold sway over Mother Hertha. Yet was there an element of order and tranquillity plainly expressed by the whole surround-

ings, which, I hardly knew why, soothed my unresting misery. As we stepped out upon the platform of the modest, well-remembered railway station, and I saw the phaeton awaiting me, as also a stable-helper for Jim's benefit, I felt cheered, and (incredible to relate) almost raised in spirits by the prospect of seeing the old Hall and its inmates once again.

'Looks like coming home again, sir!' exclaimed Jim, who had confided Wanderer to his stable companion. 'Lucky the old gentleman thought of sending Bill to give me a hand. Nothing like Old England after all, though' (as he looked at the great array of unclothed forest trees) 'there's a terrible *ring-barked* look about the whole concern in winter, ain't there, sir?'

I laughed aloud at my follower's truly Australian way of regarding the landscape, and again, after ascending the well-cushioned vehicle which bore me and my belongings along the perfectly kept highway, sternly inquired of myself the reason of this hitherto impossible levity. 'Was I so fickle, so feeble-minded, that scarce a short month after the downfall of the great dream of life, of the hope of long-expectant years, I was capable of mirth, conscious of pleasurable anticipation? Was it even so? Had the winter of my soul, darkly desolate, despairing of the morrow, commenced to thaw? And were these emotions of everyday humanity, faint as they might be, 'the first blind motions of the sap, which show the year has turned'?

With that thought came for the first time a gleam of hope, a ray which illumined the darksome chamber of my soul. What! might there be for me, as for other men, savour in life, the satisfaction of duty, the *joy of success*, the strong heart-beats of pleasure —

pleasure? Was it not possible? Had not other men been permitted to bid forth to life again the shrouded and buried corse of love?

The short day had faded out, and the stars were glimmering as the pulling horses scattered the well-kept gravel of the long avenue which led to Boldrewood Chase. I had scarce time to descend when the honest tones of my uncle's voice greeted me with unfeigned heartiness, and the warm shake of the hand assured me, almost more than his manner, that I had come 'home.' How like my dear old governor he looked, as he stood just outside of the well-lighted, hospitable hall, and gazed at me with the bold blue eyes that never had known fear or guile!

'Back again from the Green Isle, Rolf? We all thought you were going to take root there, like some of the family that went over in Old Noll's time. Great swells they are now; cut me out, as far as that goes. All the same, we're delighted to see your face again. Now, run up to your old room and dress, and we'll start fair with the introductions at dinner.'

I was not sorry to delay my presentation to the unknown cousin and the fiancé of cousin Adelgitha. After a good, leisurely toilette and the satisfactory adjustment of one's war-paint, the preliminary part of the social tournament is always more equalised. Much depends upon precautions apparently trifling. An eminent novelist describes his *jeune premier* dashing off to a doubtful but important interview on *foot*, and arriving thereat travel-stained and lowered in personal dignity. Of course he had conspicuously the worst of the encounter, the antagonist being an astute dowager. Whereas, quoth the sage chronicler, had he driven up in his carriage and arrived fresh, confident, and smiling, his success was assured.

Whether or not I acted upon these convictions, the fact was undoubted that, after the cheering influences of a glowing fire and a warm bath, I found myself, as I turned out in full evening panoply, quite a different sort of knight from the depressed warrior who had but an hour since entered the portal.

Directly I entered the drawing-room Gwen came flying up to me, and, taking both hands in hers, loudly expressed her sisterly welcome.

'So you have come home at last, you naughty, naughty boy! What a dreadful time you've been away! I thought you might have gone to India to see after Harold. Well, you look pretty well—a little thinner, perhaps, but that's an improvement. And now, let me introduce my long-lost brother Harold. This is cousin Rolf, of whom you heard us talk.'

'I have indeed,' said a slight, singularly handsome man, advancing with a deliberation in strong contrast with his sister's eager frankness. 'Our cousin has had the benefit of the most enthusiastic appreciation, I can vouch, and I only trust that Guy and I won't suffer too severely in comparison. Allow me, Rolf, to make you acquainted with Major Wyndham, and to express my pleasure at seeing you at the old place.' He bowed slightly, and, fixing his dark eyes keenly upon me, extended his hand, of which the slender fingers closed with a force I scarcely expected, and from which I augured more favourably than from his manner.

'Same here!' said the Major. 'Awfully glad you've come, and so is Githa. Used to inquire when you were coming about ten times a day. In the middle of affection's passages, too. Well, I won't tell tales, old lady. Had any decent hunting in Ireland?'

'*A few* fair runs,' I said. 'I suppose the runs and

the blank days are in the same proportion everywhere. But it was good on the whole.'

'And how did the Pirate carry you?' asked Githa, after dinner had been fully transacted and we had adjourned to the drawing-room. 'No bad fall over stone walls?'

'Quite as well as other people's horses,' I answered; 'we were neither of us killed, wounded, or missing in any engagement. But I'll tell you all about the meets the first time we ride out together. I can lend you *such* a lady's horse, Gwen!'

'What! another new horse? Why, you are as bad as papa and his shooting-ponies. By the bye, the last one nearly made him shoot a keeper, like Mr. Winkle. But what is his name, and how is he so nice?'

'Do you remember my telling you of a horse called "Emerald" that my groom knew in India?'

'You don't mean to say that you tracked him out?' inquired Gwen, with the deepest interest. 'How delightful—and is he here?'

'It's a long story,' said I, turning to Harold and the Major, 'about a horse I heard of from my groom as a well-known steeple-chaser before he came to India. I picked him up by chance at Tattersall's the other day, and I think of training him for the Grand National.'

'Do you indeed?' asked Harold, with mild interest. 'He ought to be very well bred to go the pace and stay in such company. I have seen some good Walers, but I prefer Arabs myself.'

'For hackneys, doubtless,' I replied, 'though there may be difference of opinion about that; but I take it you never knew a pure Arab that could carry thirteen stone over four miles of hunting country in flat-race time.'

CHAPTER XXXIV

'POSSIBLY not,' assented he, 'but I can't imagine anything but the English thoroughbred worthy to be named in the same day with a high-caste Arab, the king of horses, except in racing, hunting, and steeple-chasing.'

'Rather important exceptions,' I returned, 'but I'll show you a "Waler" to-morrow that may convert you; and, Gwen, get your habit ready, and if the day is decently fine I'll mount you on the sweetest hackney that ever lady reined. In requital, don't you think you could sing me one of the new songs you must have learned all this time I've been away?'

'Well, now that you have come home, all will be forgiven, as the advertisements in *The Times* say, and I really have learned such a new song. Do you remember one Elinor Westland sang while she was here? I believe she composed it herself. She sent it to me the other day, and it's lovely—only so mournful, you can't help crying.'

'Very choice ballad, I should say, from the description,' remarked Harold. 'Did you say a friend of yours wrote it, Gwen? Would you mind singing something a friend did *not* write?'

'Nonsense, Harold; sing away, Gwen,' said the Squire. 'The song's a pretty song; as for the words, one sort of nonsense is as good as another. They're all alike nowadays.'

Thus encouraged, she struck a preliminary chord or *two, and* commenced 'The Outcast.' She had great

musical talent, and had been thoroughly well taught, without being over-trained to the border of staginess—a thing most men detest. I must confess that she was lazy with her accompaniments, but the quality of her voice, a contralto of unusual richness, made up for everything. Underneath her frank, merry ways lay a mine of poetry and deep feeling which she carefully concealed in ordinary society. In her voice, too, occasionally recurred a peculiar, wistful, pleading tone inexpressibly pathetic, and such as I never heard from any other woman.

THE OUTCAST

I sit beside your garden gate,
  And wait to hear you pass,—
There's a step upon the gravel,
  A shadow on the grass.
I dare not lift my drooping head,
  Or raise my eyes to see
That face grown old with sorrow—
  Sorrow brought there by me!

Your step has lost its lightness,
  Your voice has lost its ring;
Ah me! how I remember
  The songs we used to sing!
As we sat beneath the lime tree,
  On a golden summer day,
Watching the ripening cornfields
  And our little one at play.

The wintry wind is blowing cold,
  The snow is falling fast;
My thin and tattered clothing
  Lets through the bitter blast.
My heart beats slow and painfully,
  I scarce can draw my breath—
O God! I die, and no one heeds
  The outcast's lonely death.

As the last note, which sounded like a sob, died away, I could see that my uncle's eyes were moist, and his face showed how deeply the ballad, carelessly written, perhaps, by one 'sad as night from very wantonness,' had moved him.

'My dear Gwen,' said Harold, 'I think you ought to give notice, as they do in "the House," when you are going to sing such a very wild one. You have floored the governor, and if Githa and Guy had not been preoccupied, their tears would have flowed abundantly. As it can't be considered quite appropriate either to the joyful occasion of Rolf's return, suppose you find a livelier chant.'

'It's more than touching,' said Githa,—'never mind Harold, he's an unsentimental creature—it's almost too mournful to listen to. I remember Miss Westland made us all cry when she sang it. But suppose you and Rolf sing "Garibaldi's Hymn," which you were so perfect in before he left.'

So 'Garibaldi' and 'Douglas! Douglas! tender and true' were duly performed; and the ladies departing, we men adjourned to the smoking-room, a comfortable apartment which had of late years been converted to that use and designation. The Squire did not smoke, but sensibly gave in to the exigencies of a fashion too universal to be resisted.

'I don't use tobacco in any shape myself,' he would say, 'but one can't shut one's eyes to the fact that it's no use asking the men of the present day to your house if you don't give them a decent place to smoke in before bedtime. After all, it is the time and place for a sociable chat, which I can enjoy myself; and I will say that you youngsters are sparing of the bottle after dinner, and seem more anxious to get away to your *weeds* or your pipes. Now, in a day that I can

recollect, if there was little smoking, there was much hard drinking. We must take the good with the bad. So smoke away, boys, and be happy in your own way.'

We were soon comfortably ensconced in the old oak-wainscotted room, where, in the ease and freedom of slippers and loose garments, we felt disposed to abate somewhat of the reserve which characterises all Britons, related or otherwise, at their first meeting.

'How about the hunting arrangements, Rolf?' asked the Squire. 'I suppose the new horse can't be taken out, as he will want all his time for preparation for Illingford?'

'I don't mind giving him a day or two with the Alresford, just to find if he has retained his old form. After that he must go to school, of course. What hounds are you hunting with, Harold,—shown much sport?'

'Nice pack, the Alresford,' answered he; 'good sportsman the Master, as can be; the whole thing rather slow to my taste. If it wasn't so near home I wouldn't hunt a day with them.'

'What do you say to running down to Leicestershire?' said I: 'not just yet, until the Squire begins to get tired of us; but, as the best of the season is to come, I don't see why we shouldn't see some of the cream of the hunting.'

'Good notion: I suppose you won't go with us, Guy, eh? Well, you can stay and take care of the girls and entertain the governor. You won't mind it, sir, if Rolf and I run over for a month?'

'Not at all,' quoth the kind old man, 'though in my day a man hunted with his neighbours in his own county. But I daresay Rolf wants to see the best thing that England can show in the hunting way, and

perhaps he's right. How about the training of your horse, though?'

'Oh, Jim will see to that; he is to be trusted with untold oats, and his own ambition is so bound up with the horse's success that he needs no watching.'

'Well, you'll both have to ride when you get to the grass,' quoth the Major, pretermitting his meerschaum. 'I had a season with the Atherstone a year before I left for India, and my recollection is that nothing but blood and first-class form have any chance for a place. I don't think—excuse me, Harold—that one or two of yours are *quite*—you understand.'

'They're as good as other people's,' retorted he, somewhat indignantly; 'something depends upon the riding.'

'I know that,' quoth the Major blandly; 'not that *I'm* going to ride, my dear boy. I know when I'm well off. So I shall potter about with the governor, and drive the girls out, while you and your cousin are earning fame. The life suits me wonderfully.'

'How do you find the horses here as compared with your Walers?' asked Harold; 'I suppose bigger, showing more blood, and so on?'

'That's a question which involves a deal more talking than I'm up to before bedtime,' I answered. 'You'll see mine to-morrow, and I'll look at yours. I daresay, as the day wears on, we shall find leisure for some floating remarks upon the truly grand and unfailing subject of horse-flesh.'

'Didn't you say something about a ride with the girls to-morrow, Rolf?' asked the Squire. 'Suppose we canter over to Waltham?—there's something to see there.'

'Only too glad; and now, as I have been travelling, *I should say* bed was about a fair thing.'

As fast we swept through sun and shade,
The happy breezes round us played,
She looked so lovely as she swayed
The rein with dainty finger-tips.
GORDON.

The girls came to breakfast in their habits, in joyous anticipation of the half picnic which we had fixed to make beneath the oaks at Waltham.

No costume is so becoming to a woman in the 'flower time' of her fresh youth, if she adds to her charms the ease and grace of motion which a finished horsewoman possesses. My fair cousins had never lacked practice, since their earliest Shetland-pony days, and the Squire had always encouraged and promoted their fondness for the exercise. Both rode well, but Gwen had the larger share of nerve, and of that natural aptitude which we call talent, for want of a better name, and lacking which the highest degree in art or science is unattainable. Without a tinge of unfeminine boldness, she was quietly confident and self-possessed, while her 'hands' were better, as I had often told her, than those of any one of her sex I had ever seen. Knowing so much of her qualifications, it gave me more pleasure (pleasure again!) than one might have supposed the occasion warranted to see her handle Emerald, believing him, as I did, to be the *most perfect* palfrey that ever carried a side-saddle.

Many a time I had heard of him in Melbourne on my occasional overland trips to that energetic city. His owner, Mr. Goldstein, was *un galant' uomo*, and when Emerald was not in training, and indeed sometimes when he was in that critical condition, he was to be seen with a dame or damsel proudly careering, the envy of all the habit-wearing world of fashion. I had therefore been in the way of hearing the panegyrics

which were lavished upon him. Praises about his wonderful walking; of his beautiful light mouth, so delicate yet so firm; of his lovely temper, 'too good for this wicked world,' which permitted the more ambitious of his fair mistresses to send him a half-mile spin, and have the excitement of a scamper, neck and neck, sometimes with one of the turf celebrities of the period, and how, the strength and the breath of the fair Amazon having reached their limit, when the time came for surrender, with what mild acquiescence he subsided into his rocking-chair amble. These chronicles I had heard from the lips of Gracie Ventnor, Clara Wildspin, and the beautiful Mrs. Laymere. Therefore I repeat that I felt a sensation almost approaching that described as pleasure by poets, novelists, and other imaginative persons, when I pictured the trial of so superb a palfrey as Emerald by so appreciative an amateur as my cousin Gwen. When the horses were brought round, the compliments and exclamations mostly fell to the share of the gallant grey, as of old.

'Oh, what a darling he looks!' cried Gwen. 'I haven't seen such a lady's horse for I don't know how long. What a lovely tail he has, and such a soft mild eye; I feel quite fond of him already.'

'Wait till you have ridden him,' I said; 'his looks are nothing to his manners, and his paces are better than either.'

'He must be an angel then, or indeed an archangel,' said Githa, who was proceeding to be lifted on to a gaudy chestnut by the Major—a task of some difficulty, as that animal sidled and declined to stand. 'I wish Carnation would take a lesson, and you too, Guy—look there!'

This last exclamation was called forth by the sight of Gwen, who, poising her weight upon my hand for a

second, was lifted lightly into her saddle, while the old horse arched his neck and played with the curb rein, as pleased to feel the remembered accessories of a 'sweet girl graduate' once more.

'Come along, Githa!' said Harold, rather impatiently; 'are you going to be all day? Guy used to manage that business better in India. Don't you remember Mrs. Reckleston?—but I won't recall past indiscretions.'

'Mrs. Reckleston was *your* great friend,' retorted the Major crossly; 'it's all the fault of this confounded mare of yours; I don't want to break Githa's neck—just at present.'

While we were laughing at this passage of arms, the chestnut recovered her nerves; and the Major having vindicated his Indian reputation by swinging his fiancée successfully into her seat, we moved on, Emerald lifting up his head in a lordly manner, and marching with free, elastic pace to the front, as if it were his unquestioned right. The day was a successful compromise between 'the hard grey weather,' which Charles Kingsley valued so largely, and the inevitable shower-bath that keeps uppermost the leading English idea, 'we are catching cold.' The clouds were low, the sky was grey, but the air was mild and softly moist. A light mist hung over the rich meadows, and curled around the narrow, sluggish streams. The brown fallows were bare and cold; but the Squire, who was a great weather-sage, decided that at mid-day we should feel an exceptional warmth and brightness.

'I always notice,' said he, 'that with the wind in the present quarter, and a mist in the morning, a fine day follows, and a fine day we shall have, girls. So what do you say to going as far as the Itchen? We can have a look at Tichborne Hall, and be back in good time too.'

'Oh, delightful!' said Gwen; 'the farther the better for me. I was never so carried in my life, and shall be able to pull out a peg in Emerald directly, I believe, and he will fly away to the kingdom of China, or somewhere, like the enchanted steed in the *Arabian Nights*.'

So we rode to the bank of the ancient stream, called Trisanton by the Romans, and rambled about the grand old manor-house, which had looked on Chidiock Tichborne being led away to die for a folly of youth, and seen 'the dole' delivered by the *châtelaines* of the race, for many a generation.

'Isn't this the place that some ruffian from Australia claims? (with all deference to you, Rolf),' asked Harold. 'We heard a lot about it in India.'

'This is the place,' answered the Squire; 'and I can tell you this, that a number of people fully believe that he *is* the right man.'

'So I have heard,' put in Major Wyndham; 'they say no end of the officers and men of the Carabiniers—Roger Tichborne's old regiment—are ready to swear to his identity. But what do you say, Boldrewood? Did you ever fall across this mysterious fellow-colonist of yours?'

'Well! curiously enough, I have the honour of his acquaintance. I bought a herd of cattle near the country town which he dignified by his residence; and, indeed, sold a lame bullock to the heir of an ancient race, who was then known as Tom Castro, the butcher.'

'How wonderful it seems!' said Gwen; 'but I suppose that people do all kinds of strange things for a livelihood in a new country?'

'And are received in the highest society, Gwen, all the time. For, in our unconventional land, we adhere *to lofty* ideals, impossible to realise in this artificial

country. Just imagine the high-souled, long-descended tradesman apologising to the belle of the ballroom for leaving before the last galop, because of his early morning engagements in the matter of chops and steaks.'

'Now you are laughing at us, I feel sure,' said Githa; 'but we English people believe that all kinds of things are possible in your romantic country.'

'Some things are possible, I grant you, that could not be carried out harmoniously in English country life; but, as new-comers find out after a time, colonial society is governed in the main by precisely the same social laws as you acknowledge. There, as here, "sets" or subdivisions of society are rigorously maintained, which means, simply, that people combine to guard themselves from uncongenial associates.'

'What sort of fellow was the butcher, then?' asked Harold; 'did he look like a born cad, or only like a fellow who had turned blackguard from choice, or hereditary predisposition?'

'My fixed opinion, founded upon personal inspection and some evidence,' said I, 'is that the claimant is an impostor. He did not wear the least appearance of the type of "lapsed gentleman," with which, in Australia, we are tolerably familiar. A low-born adventurer, whom travel had furnished with a thin veneer over his native coarseness; he had so much of the gambler's courage as would enable him to risk a heavy forfeit on the chance of landing a big stake.'

'But it *is* a tremendous swindle,' quoth the Major, 'when you come to look at it, for an outsider to go in for, if he had no sort of claim. Think of all the circumstantial lies he must swear to, not to mention the mountain of "early memories" that he will stagger under. Really, it raises one's opinion of the talent of

the lower classes to think one of them capable of working out such a campaign against overwhelming odds.'

'It does require something above the brain of an ordinary criminal, I admit,' said I; 'but from what I've heard from a close observer of that department of human nature, he is the very man to do it. He is an absolute Count Fosco, in aptitude, for that particular fraud, as he is in person, and I feel certain that he will carry out the fight to the end. His coolness and nerve are proverbial.'

'But suppose you are all mistaken,' said Gwen mischievously, 'and he turns out to be the right man, and gets the estates, won't you believe in him then?'

'Not even if he gets the estates,' I returned; 'I shall never permit my convictions to be disturbed by such a trifling circumstance. I have seen gentlemen shepherds, and gentlemen bullock-drivers, and gentlemen cooks, yes, and gentlemen butchers—for a friend of mine officiated with a cleaver and steel, temporarily; but they never lost their accent, their manners, their ability to read and spell English, or their knowledge of other languages. The Claimant has failed in all these tests. Therefore, I shall live and die in my conviction that he is an impostor.'

'But is it possible,' pleaded Githa, who, with the romance of her sex, felt a half sympathy with the gallant and perhaps ill-fated exile, 'that after years of rude companionship in the bush, too, even a gentleman might forget much of his former ways and feelings?'

'Not at all possible,' I answered with slight warmth; 'not even *half* so probable in Australia as in most other places. Such a degeneration would be more easily reached by a handicraftsman *gentilhomme among* the boors of Suffolk, or the brickmakers of

Kent. But in the most remote interior of Australia you meet with "broken men" who have shared the revels of the *haute volée* in every court of Europe—men who can chatter the *argot* of Paris, or sing Italian buffo songs when they essay to drown old griefs in new rum. No! a Frenchman might as well give as an excuse for forgetting his native tongue, that he had been living in Leicester Square, as an educated Englishman make the astounding assertion that he had lost absolutely all trace of former culture by residence in any portion of Australia.'

CHAPTER XXXV

THE evening was closing as we returned; we were therefore under the necessity of improving our pace, in order to reach home before nightfall. We crossed a common at no great distance from the Chase, where I hinted to Gwen that she might let out Emerald, if she was not afraid of a hand-gallop. As we swept along at three-quarter speed, the old horse shaking his head and playfully pretending to race, my cousin's admiration was unbounded.

'I never *did* feel anything like this in my life; it seems like being carried by a deer; what a long, beautiful stride he has, and yet so springy and elastic. He puts me in mind of that grand description of Sir Walter Scott's in *The Talisman*, where Saladin and the Knight of the Leopard take to flight on the two wonderful Arab mares. I always used to wish I had been on one of them, and now I can realise it. I declare I feel quite sorry to pull up—one could go on for ever.'

'I am afraid we have left our party behind,' I answered, 'as the Emir and his captive did the heavier steeds of their pursuers. But he is such a hackney as I never rode before, and I am glad you appreciate him.'

'There is but one prophet, and his name is Emerald. I shall never believe in any other again. Are there many Australian horses like him?'

'We rear thousands of fine horses annually,' said I; 'but he is a rare and precious creature, not easily matched anywhere. I feel half sorry that I have entered him for the Grand National now. You might have had so many pleasant rides.'

'It's too late now, isn't it? And, besides, it would be selfish. But you mustn't hurt yourself in the race, though I daresay Githa and I could nurse you if it wasn't too serious.'

'If it were no worse than a collar-boner, or even a broken arm, I should like it above all things. There is such a delicious sense of repose and irresponsibility when one is knocked out of time—by an accident. You can't possibly be expected to do any work, mental or physical, till you are pronounced convalescent. And if the hospital were the Chase, and you and Githa wore the Geneva Cross, I could bear what they call a lingering illness with great fortitude.'

'Could you really, Rolf?' asked she, with a sudden tone of tenderness which was quite unlike the merry Gwen, whose spirits were generally leagues above nurses and wounded knights. 'But now that you are here, we must take all the care of you we can. I have a presentiment that you will have to depart for that far country of yours before long.'

'I begin to fear also that my holiday may be *shortened*,' I replied, 'from certain signs and intima-

tions that I have had. Things are looking far from well in the colonies, and one of our periodical "dry seasons" is approaching. So all the reserves will be engaged, and I shall be called to the front as sure as fate when the battle becomes serious.'

'I wish I could go out and fight beside you—that is, if I were a man,' added she in less decided accents. 'I feel sometimes as if we were too comfortable and safe, and inside the garden wall, here at the Chase. I would give up all that now and then to feel that I was aiding in noble work, doing something with one's time beyond the eternal round of playing at duty and working at pleasure, to which so many of us women are doomed.'

'But you would find most of the work and all the associations distasteful, my dearest cousin,' remonstrated I; 'and, ah me! how dreary and monotonous would look certain of our landscapes when contrasted with an English home, with its "grey twilight poured on dewy pastures, dewy trees, softer than sleep; all things in order stored—a haunt of ancient peace." Not that there is no element of grandeur about the boundless sweep of a plain ocean, the brilliant, often too brilliant, azure sky, the mountain fringed from base to peak with primeval forests, where the wandering *savant* feasts his eyes and crowds his notebook. But to find aught but weariness and discontent in all this demands a vivid imagination or a heart lifted to a lofty ideal, and capable of sustained fidelity to the conception.'

'And are there no hearts equal to so high a trust living and pulsating now, Rolf? Has the race degenerated so utterly, as satirical writers are fond of asserting, that the souls of the true women of old days have not descended to their posterity? Once *they* lived and suffered and were strong, or history deceives.

Are we all fit for nothing but tennis and fancy work, with intervals of active dissipation in town, relieved by desultory dreaming in the country?'

'My sweet cousin, that is, my valiant Britomart! are you not hard upon your sisters in this legended isle? They must do something, *pour passer le temps*, and they cannot all find dragons to fight, or forests to penetrate, though, perhaps, they do not all neglect the knight-errant. If they did not give their minds to pleasure, what occupation could they find for their, let us say, socially restricted faculties?'

'Now you are laughing at me, and not talking seriously, which I detest. But I only mean to say in a roundabout way, that sooner than devote every waking thought to the pitiful thing which fashionable women and their imitators call pleasure—a fetish made up of folly, flattery, and new clothes—I would be a washerwoman, and have my hands all crinkled up with soap-suds, like old Mrs. Thryme.'

'I know a young lady,' said I sympathisingly, 'for whom Fate was kind enough to provide a piece of work that would, in your present state of mind, have suited you down to the ground, as the Major says.'

'Did you really; what was it?'

'Well, she was one of the officers' wives, or daughters, shut up in sore danger of life and liberty in a hill-fort in the Great Mutiny. Their path was cleared by the goodness of Providence, and they travelled four hundred miles, principally on horseback, to headquarters. The girl I speak of had a pet Arab which carried her all the way, and she fed, dressed, and looked after him herself, till they finished their journey.'

'What a delightful thing to be obliged to do!' exclaimed she with unfeigned admiration. 'I should *have* enjoyed it above everything. But I'm sure he

wasn't so nice as Emerald, notwithstanding Harold, who has quite a craze about Arabs. Here they all come! Why, what a time you *have* been! We thought you must have lost the road.'

'Come, Gwendoline!' retorted Githa, 'that is not quite fair. We thought the new horse had run away with *you*, and papa would have been anxious, only he said Rolf was never wrong about horses, though Harold said that Walers were mostly nervous, and not fit for ladies to ride.'

'There are Walers and Walers, Githa; the horses, the men, and even the women born in that fantastic region are, strange as it may appear, not all formed upon the same pattern. Harold has probably known a cheap and indifferent sample, which I hereby give up to justice.'

'Well, here we are at the Lodge gate!' said Gwen; 'I feel really grieved; I could gallop all night.'

'If we had only a milk-white beach, firm and wide, with a broad, yellow moon, and a murmuring sea!' said I. 'I have ridden on such a path a summer night through, and seen the sun burn like a vast opal through the dawn clouds over a slumbering ocean.'

'Don't talk of it. To think that we can do nothing now but dress for dinner. Good-night, you darling Emerald! I must come and see you to-morrow.'

. . . . . .

For weeks life at the Chase flowed on after a peaceful, uneventful, most enjoyable fashion. Harold and I hunted regularly with the Alresford hounds, impressing the people of the county with the fixed idea that neither of us set any exorbitant value upon his neck. Harold had four hunters to my two; but Wanderer was faster than anything in his stable, besides being a very clever, all-round fencer; while the

Pirate, in the matter of jumping, pure and simple, was unsurpassed by any horse in the county.

My cousin was a light weight. Joining to this advantage undeniable pluck and first-class horsemanship, he was a hard man to beat. Inclined, nevertheless, to overmuch reliance upon his own judgment, lacking also, as do most men who have never ridden any but made horses all their lives, that intuitive comprehension of any given horse's capacity which men acquire who have known all sorts and conditions equine, from the first day of backing to the finishing pupil stage.

Thus he could not be brought to see why I put Emerald upon a pinnacle of superiority as compared with Wanderer or Pirate.

'I can't say I should be inclined to back either of them for the Grand National; but if you *were* bent upon having a throw in, I wonder you didn't enter either of the English horses. They are known to be thoroughbred, and that goes a long way with me in such a race.'

'If Emerald be not thoroughbred,' I answered, 'there is but the faintest stain in his pedigree. I know it for several generations on both sides, and his grandam's sire, the "Sheikh," was the best Arab that ever left India, it is said, and such a one that money would not buy now. Besides,' I added, 'I *know* his pace to be uncommon, his courage to be undeniable. Moreover, I *saw* him carry thirteen stone five, and win a steeplechase in Australia, over three miles and a half of country, fenced in such a way as you never see here.'

'Then you think you have a really good chance of pulling it off?'

'*I* don't say that; I shall do my best, and the old

horse will do his, without telling. I think he'll take some beating, if the pace is good, and the leaps stiff—that is his particular fancy.'

Since the day of our expedition to Tichborne Hall, Emerald had been subjected to the stern ordeal of full preparation for the great event, in which Jim fondly hoped he was to cover himself with glory, and to justify our faith in the horses of our native land.

'The Major don't quite believe in him,' said that worthy; 'he told me the other day that he thought the Cape of Good Hope horses, from what he'd seen in India, were as good as the Walers, as he calls 'em. I never saw a Cape animal that was fit to be named in the same day with him, or any regular well-bred horse from our side. They're well enough in their way, and game enough, I don't deny; but under-sized as a lot, and short of blood, like the Valparaisos we used to have such shiploads of. If the old horse comes on, as he's doing now, he'll show 'em a dance for the big race as'll open their eyes a bit, as sure as my name's Jim Whitby. But it's no use blowin' about him. We'll all see when the time comes.'

With this sensible conclusion Jim wound up his remarks, which, except to me, he was chary in making, having the habit common to good grooms of holding his tongue religiously about stable matters.

The time had now arrived for putting into execution our project of having a sail 'over the grass' in the crack, hunting county; and seeing, as far as I was concerned, for the first time, the historical pastures over which so many generations of the best blood in England, horse and man, had acquired deathless renown. Had I been left entirely to myself, I should have hied me to this classic vicinage at the beginning of the season; and recalled, while crossing Tarlby gorse, and

the famous Whissendine, the immortal chronicle of Mr. Snob at Melton-Mowbray, and that latter-day hero, Mr. John Standish Sawyer, at Market Harborough. Should have made a point of joining the soul-stirring tryst of the Quorn at Kirby Gate, and have given the Pirate the chance of mending his manners, and redeeming his character, among his old associates. But fate had been stronger than I, and circumstances had bent me, like many another stout, resolving mortal, to her resistless route. However, there remained yet a fragment of opportunity, and I was minded to make the most of it.

It so befell that, on a certain morning, our leave had been granted, and all arrangements completed for the eventful visit to the shires. After some consultation, Harold and I had decided upon Melton-Mowbray as the scene of our exploits. He had been there before, and we should, therefore, possess a certain advantage in locating ourselves, and in acquaintance, not merely with the *locale*, but also with some of the *habitués* of that central hunting rendezvous. I had hired a couple of useful hunters from that very convenient and obliging personage, Mr. Anderson, thinking it better, in view of my probable departure to Australia, to adopt this method of temporarily augmenting my stud. I secured a steady groom from the Boldrewood stables, so we had despatched the whole *cortège* by train the day before, and were to follow in more leisurely fashion ourselves.

'Oh dear!' said Gwen, as we mustered at breakfast, 'there seem to be nothing but leave-takings and departures in this world. You are no sooner back with Harold, who has been years away, than you are off again. Why can't you stay comfortably at home, like *Guy does*?'

'Every one hasn't Guy's luck and inducement, you see,' answered Harold. 'You don't make allowance for a fellow's natural wish to see as much as he can when he *does* come home. I have been broiling in India, which, in spite of the popular idea, is an awfully slow place when there's no fighting going on; and Rolf has been wasting his sweetness on the desert air of Ireland. So you must really let us go on the loose for a while.'

'Of course, of course,' said the Squire, who always permitted himself to be governed by Harold in the most amusing way; 'Gwen mustn't expect you boys to be tied to her apron strings. We shall see you back by March, in time for the great event, and we can have all ready for the expedition to Illingford. We must do the thing in style then.'

'I suppose it is the way of the world,' answered Gwen, with a mock air of resignation; 'men go about everywhere, it being your privilege to be amused, while we women must stay at home till it pleases your highnesses to condescend to return and receive our small attentions. I think I shall superintend Emerald's training while you are away, Rolf, and take Mr. Whitby into my confidence.'

'I suppose *I* count for nothing,' said the Major, in a tone of deep humility. 'I know even a married man is ever so much more important, socially, than an engaged one; still, with Githa's permission, and the Squire's help, I might do something to fill up the aching void.'

'Why, Gwen!' said I, 'one would think we were going out to Zanzibar instead of a couple of counties off for a month. We shall be back before you have quite realised our departure. And when we come back, we must go and do the New Forest, and Lyndhurst, and Ashby-de-la-Zouch, and all the nooks and corners sacred to his late lamented Majesty, King Rufus.'

'Gwen and I will make you such a lovely set of colours, Rolf,' said Githa, 'that you won't be able to lose, if you try ever so much. Violet and gold, isn't it? I like it above all things. So mind you don't get too many falls, and spoil your chance of winning, for we have set our hearts upon driving you back in triumph.'

So we departed, being, like men of all ages, incapable of knowing when we were well off, despising the safety of assured happiness, and thirsting for unknown and possibly delusive splendours and successes.

So hath it ever been, so will it ever be, with the men of our race, the unresting, insatiable Anglo-Saxon. To him contentment is the least possible of all virtues; ennui the most terrible of all fiends. From the paradise of the known and the familiar, how beflowered and beturfed soever, we fly to the desert, the wave, the battlefield, for that change and contrast which are indispensable to our strangely constituted organisms.

We arrived in due course, and bestowed ourselves at the hotel in which we had secured rooms. The cheerful town wore an important, business-like appearance in the particular line to which it owes its eminence. Horses were evidently the chief commodity. Grooms, helpers, and stable-magnates, remarkable for the neatness of their rig, and the tightness of their nether garments, were to be seen in the shops, in the streets, and generally in all directions; while hunters, and covert hacks, returning from exercise, the field, or the blacksmith's shop, were visible to the naked eye on all sides. To my great delight, I encountered Aymer Brandon and his friend, Jack M'Callum, learning from them that Herbert Ainslie, with other leading Australians, had been there all the season, disporting themselves among the front-rankers, 'with comfort to themselves, and *satisfaction* to the spectators.'

'I hope your horses are up to the mark, Boldrewood,' said my tall friend, 'or you won't keep up our prestige. Ainslie has a strong stud, and being a light weight, and so old a hand in the steeplechase way, he has given us Australians an uncomfortably good character to keep up. It's hard on me, you know, as I can't ride under sixteen stone.'

'It's hard on your horses, you mean,' I returned; 'for I know by experience that you always get along somehow as well as the lightest weight among them all. How are you mounted? I have a horse that would carry you, quite your style, temper and all.'

'Have you indeed, Rolf? Well, you were always of an obliging turn of mind. I have a few nags up to weight, and have broken no bones as yet, though I "go in fear" of a coroner being found necessary, if we have many runs like that of yesterday. I had much comfort out of Jack's friendly welter-weight, as keeping me in countenance, but he has betrayed me.'

'What do you mean, Aymy?' asked M'Callum wrathfully; 'what humbug are you up to now?'

'It's a profound secret, I know,' answered Brandon, with an air of confidential caution; 'only among friends I may mention that he has been *banting* lately, and has got himself down to twelve stone and a half, leaving me stranded at my old weight; if that is not deserting an old friend, and hurting his tenderest feelings, I don't know what is. And now, will you and your cousin dine with us to-night, and I'll give you my notion as to the best line of operations? We are well up in the *carte du pays*.'

'And in the other *carte* too,' affirmed M'Callum; 'having reorganised the dinner department with marked success. Come and judge for yourselves.'

So we joined them at their lodgings after complet-

ing arrangements for the morrow, and as Harold and I wended our way back to our quarters, at a comparatively discreet hour, he agreed with me that the privations of pioneering did not necessarily exclude the culture of a natural talent when it took the direction of the gentle science of gastronomy.

'Those fellows know how to live, it is clear,' he confessed. 'I haven't assisted at a more complete thing since I returned. We used to have our little repasts in India, but the confounded climate bore hard upon our well-meant efforts. If they ride as well as they dine, they do honour to their country.'

CHAPTER XXXVI

'YOU would have been rather astonished to have dropped in at Warranbane then,' I said, 'for they were neighbours, though not partners, and agreed to keep house together for mutual convenience. I rode there one hot-wind day, and was recommended by the butler to try the ice-creams.'

'Ice-creams,' I expostulated, 'a hundred and fifty miles from town.'

'I think you will find them reasonable, sir,' persisted that official mildly. 'Mr. M'Callum 'ave imported a hice machine, and we turns 'em out reg'lar.'

'It was even so, as I proved by repeated experience before an eight-o'clock dinner. Fancy the luxurious dogs!'

'Butler—ice-creams—late dinners!' echoed Harold in wild astonishment; 'are you talking of Australia or *Belgravia*? Did they ever make any money?'

'They owned two of the best-managed and best-paying stations in their district,' affirmed I; 'they kept a stud of hunters, hunted with a subscription pack of fox-hounds every winter as regularly as they do here, and made heaps of money, as all the world knows.'

'You take away my breath,' he ejaculated faintly; 'and to think that you fellows should come home here and give yourselves airs as hardy pioneers, explorers, and the rest of it, while we "poor Indians, whose untutored minds" have been mainly concerned with revenue-collecting in pestilential districts, as dull as they are dangerous, with a trifle of fighting for change of occupation, are usually credited with oriental luxury—popularly believed, forsooth, to live upon lamb stuffed with pistachio nuts, and other delicacies, as set forth in the *Arabian Nights!*'

'How difficult it seems for English people to believe,' I remonstrated, 'that money is made in Australia, as in most other places, less by manual labour than by the exercise of the higher faculties which Providence has bestowed upon colonists, perhaps not unequally, as compared with their home-keeping relations. We have an impression out there that a man who personally performs the ruder duties of his profession is an indifferent economist, much as though a merchant should consume his days in writing out invoices, and his spare time in sweeping out his warehouses.'

'Lord Scamperdale's servants, it is recorded,' he answered half musingly, 'came to the decision that he was "mad, but capable of managing his own affairs." Leaving out the presumed insanity, it seems to me that you colonists are entitled to the same verdict. I am coming to believe that Australians one and all may safely be left to their own guidance, though in England I own I'm in a minority.'

. . . . . .

Those sanguine persons, who are convinced that it is only necessary to arrive at hunting fixtures punctually to ensure good sport and wonderful runs, rely upon hope rather than experience. To the man of many seasons nothing is more thoroughly proved than the fact that, in despite of good scenting weather, scientific handling, and unsparing outlay, good sport is rare; while 'the run of the season' is in strong exception to general practice. Blank days abound, earths have been left unstopped, the scent has been over-ridden. Frosts seem to have but awaited the arrival of the stranger to settle on the land with iron pitilessness; while the chorus of consolation runs much to the same tune as that of fishermen, in like default—'If you had only come last week!' The raider upon the hospitality and recreation of any given locality for a brief interval not infrequently then departs, cursing his luck, disbelieving in the general chronicles of *The Field*, and either refuses to return, or decides to take up his abode there in future from the earliest cub-hunting to the last—really the last—appearance of the hunt.

Such, however, was not to be our treatment at the hands of the swift, stern goddess of the glades.

The morning succeeding our arrival in the kingdom of Reynard the Great was blessed with the traditional 'southerly wind and cloudy sky' long dear to hounds, horsemen, and not improbably (as the veteran huntsman believed) to the indispensable quadruped himself. We had decided to go as far afield as Market Harborough, and to that end sent our hacks to Welsted overnight, and picking them up after an early start found ourselves at the fixture in good time. There we saw our horses awaiting us. I had committed my fortunes to Wanderer; Harold had chosen the brilliant but hazardous Carnation; while Aymer Brandon bestowed his vast frame upon

the Templar, an immensely powerful black horse, quite thoroughbred, and standing well over sixteen two. He was not a pleasant-tempered animal, and when he got away was capable of pulling a lighter man over his head. But no plunging or boring on his part had power to shake the seat or nerve of his rider, who, sitting unmoved, took no more heed of his gambols than if they were both carved in stone. Herbert Ainslie was well to the fore on a brown, in splendid condition, evidently a performer and worth any price, reasonable or unreasonable. Jack M'Callum, justly proud of the recent slimness of his waist, was also well mounted, and looked like a man who might be thrown, but whom it would be next to impossible to hurt, so successfully had he eliminated all unmuscular development.

'We are in for a cracker to-day,' said I to Brandon; 'we shall see whether the light-weights or the heavies will have the best of it. You must have some difficulty in mounting yourself. Why, you might do for the apparition of that King Edward whom the knight saw in *Marmion*—

> Alike his Syrian courser's frame,
> The rider's length of limb, the same;

though the Templar is as big as any three Syrian nags I ever saw.'

'Well, I have to pay of course, but you can have *almost any* article you require in England, provided that you are willing to stand the price. Good field out to-day; always a favourite meet here.'

The county had mustered in force; more strangers than usual; a sprinkling of ladies, the county magnates with broughams, barouches, waggonettes, traps of all descriptions which had evidently been put into requisition for those who lived at no great distance.

The seniors of the hunt were my especial admiration. A well-preserved elderly gentleman (and he is always well preserved who has lived in the country, and hunted all his life) is a pleasing and inspiring sight. Apart from the natural approbation with which all regard a hale and honourable old age, there is the shadowing forth of the probability of one's attaining to the same dignified position in the declining days. How cheery looked those fresh-complexioned seniors! Years of riot and unhallowed pleasure had manifestly never lent their aid to the manufacture of those frosted heads and clear steadfast eyes, which still looked kindly forth on man and nature. All honour to the veterans of the chase—the most popular, and not the least influential section of the Squirearchy of Britain!

The country was different from any in which I had hunted before, perhaps resembling the Westmeath pastures more nearly than any within my experience. There were the same large enclosures, the same formidable hedges and ditches, the same long stretches of turf, so different from the cramped nature of the slower hunting country which I had lately left. As for the bulk of the customers, they had any number of hunters; money was not reckoned in the formation of their studs; and as for hard riding, he who is not fully satisfied on that point, where we found ourselves, is indeed hard to please.

Among others of the Australian contingent, which was pretty well represented at Melton, I had fallen across Colonel Acton of the Engineers, now Sir Archibald of that ilk, and a full-blown Governor, who had a year or two earlier held an important appointment in the Colonies. We had taken up a reasonably good position, and had then gone off at score into the field of Australian politics, when we were joined by the

Master, who had, for reasons of his own, taken a fancy for our corner of the wood. From time to time the varying melody, now low and running over the minor key, now rising in confident, full-throated chorus from the woodland depths, told that the favourite covert was not to be drawn blank. The field had diverged to another point, drawn thereto by one of those unexplained impulses that sway hunting men—jealous for a start, and impatient of the 'masterly inactivity' which in hunting, as in cricket, seems so often the rule rather than the exception—when, lo! before our very eyes, so near that we 'held our breath for awe,' stole forth a gallant fox, and crossing the road, sneaked down a hedgerow at right angles. The Master telegraphs imploringly. We are sufficiently *au courant* of the unwritten code to view the fast-retreating outlaw with tolerant silence. We note him regard doubtfully and pass a score of grazing kine; then, quitting his line of scant cover, strike boldly for the far blue hills of Hemplow. By this time the wistful treble has increased in volume and intensity. A few twangs of the horn; the deeper notes of the older hounds betoken a roused consciousness of the state of affairs; the leading hounds string out and crossing the road hit off the scent; when, after one glorious burst of such music as well repays the stranger for loss of opportunity, money, and a year of life, the whole pack settles in mute ecstasy to the line. The Master with an approving glance at us relaxes for a moment his expression of consuming anxiety, and takes his horse by the head. Lower down the line the huntsman and first whip crash out of the wood, with reckless indifference to their integuments, personal and otherwise, while Wanderer clears the first hedge with such unnecessary elevation as extorts a general cheer from the foot-spectators.

pops over the second in less theatrical style; while I, sailing along with an enviable start, on a 'fit' horse, at the tail of the best pack in Britain, forget 'home and friends, and native land,' love, hope, despair—Gwen, Githa, and Isidora Blake, *and* am—perfectly happy!

'Lives there a man with soul so dead?' I was about to say—but no! why should I assault by causeless repetition that much-abused but grand burst of patriotic poesy, only one degree less hardly treated than the famed 'eidolon,' the undying yet unborn New Zealander of Macaulay? Refraining from borrowed plumelets, how shall I do justice with calmness and accuracy to the majesty of the sensation?

Sport of kings! Tourney of the noblest knighthood of the latter ages! Valhalla of heroes! How shall I thank thee worthily, good birthland of the spur and snaffle, for the thorough grounding in all the lore of the *manège* which enables me to hold mine own 'amid the press of knights'?

'All this is very well,' thought I, returning to more practical reflections; 'but suppose this is a second "horse day," and how about water? These are only fair hunting fences, and Wanderer is going "like a bird." Will he see it out at the same pace? Would not the Pirate have been the better horse for an introduction to this galloping country?' I own myself that I was a trifle obstinate in deciding to take Wanderer, in opposition to the old groom, who, perhaps, for reasons of his own, desired to see some of the nonsense taken out of 'yon bo-kicker.' I have a strong dislike to be governed in the management of any department whatsoever from below. I thoroughly appreciate the wisdom of the *noble* lord's stern command to his gardener, to plant *the shrub* 'upside down.' So I resisted the suggestion

of Jesse Thorley, who had been thirty years at Boldrewood 'man and boy,' and performed that difficult achievement, where an old family servant is concerned, of getting my own way. Now that I had got it, I was uncertain as to the probable consequences.

But I trusted in the breeding of Wanderer, the safe and successful way in which he had hitherto carried me, and the exceedingly high opinion Jim entertained of him—and which that experienced and astute personage rarely formed erroneously—as to horses.

The country was almost too good—the sound turf and stretching pastures, like a ball-room indifferently filled, and with 'such a perfect floor,' inviting you to take more out of yourself or your steed than is altogether prudent, in the matter of pace.

Wanderer, a smooth, long-striding goer, covered the ground more rapidly than was apparent. The fences were only respectable as yet, and as the good horse took them in his stride, I felt as if we, like the brook, could 'go on for ever,' and retain our proud position —as near the tail hounds as respectful consideration permitted.

At the first moment of returning consciousness, after the delirious glory of the start, I looked round for Acton, but he was not to be seen. The Master had slightly altered his line, but was evidently conscious that a great day and a kill were before us. As the pace of the hounds became better and better, I began to realise what a crack Leicestershire pack was like, and to calculate what a luxury, not to say necessity, the mounting of a second horse would be later in the day.

Not that I am quite in a position of solitary greatness while these ideas occur to me. A score or two of the 'undeniables' have forced themselves into the

prominence which they had temporarily lost at the start, while a slight check, and a half turn, brings up an even larger detachment, some of whom from long experience had calculated upon this very turn in their favour from a Hemplow fox.

They are just in time to have an equal share of interest in the first brook, which is now plain to be seen a couple of fields in advance, with a wavering line of pollards. The take-off is none too good, as I can see by the rushy patches, so I put on all steam, and we charge it in a rank that stretches about a quarter of a mile wide. It is not an absolute 'yawner,' though of sufficient dimensions to thin the field considerably. One of the whips is soused as well as an ambitious lightweight stockbroker. Wanderer gets over comfortably, without much to spare—but such is the usual practice of that temperate steed.

'You don't know what that horse can do, sir,' Jim was wont to declare, oracularly, 'nor what he can't; he's like a chap that hides his play at billiards, he beats one man by a point or two, and then a crack player plays him for a fiver, and he beats *him* just by a shade, so nobody knows for certain what his strength is. Wanderer always seems to play up to what's wanted of him. He can jump water, and he can jump timber, and he's pretty fast along with it all. If he was a bit bigger, he'd be very awkward in that steeplechase as there is such a noise about.'

After the brook and its successful negotiation, I had leisure to observe some of my associates who had been similarly successful. Aymer Brandon had apparently had his usual luck, for he was sweeping along on the Templar, whose savage pulling proved that he had not gone into the question of weight thus early. Jack M'Callum and Herbert Ainslie were no great distance

apart, the former showing by certain stains and splashes that he had 'got over with a fall,' while the latter going quite within himself was evidently making one of those calculations with a view to personal aggrandisement, the uniform success of which had led to the belief that, good as were his seat and hands, in hunting field, flat race, or steeplechase, his *head* was better than either.

Well with the hounds now were all the eminent *indigènes*—lords and squires, yeomen and farmers, cavalrymen down from London, besides those enthusiastic devotees who, lured from afar by the high quality of the sport, came annually to pitch their tents for the season. I thought that I caught a fleeting glimpse of 'the Honourable,' and wondered whether he had secured 'Boadicea, by Bluelight,' or was compelled by fate and Mr. Tiptop to trust his aristocratic person to the tender mercies of 'Topsy-turvy.' What with the increasing severity of the pace, the constant succession of jumps, most of them important, and the indomitable courage of the fox, who still held on as if he could go to London, it became apparent that Wanderer would have need of all his condition, and that mysterious reserve of stoutness which Jim hinted at, if we were to see the finish with unblemished reputation.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THOUGHTS of tired horses, miles from home, with tales of all the devices by which jealous owners had concealed the shortcomings of their hunters, now began to float through my mind. As mile after mile was thrown behind us, and still the same stretch of pasture, with

the same banks and ditches, the occasional flight of rails and the recurring brook, I began to wonder whether the stride of my horse was not shortening, whether his wind was not failing, whether he was not 'coming back' to me; whether, in fact, for the first time since I had hunted in Britain, I should have to 'take miss' and to submit to the mortification of failure.

With the energy of doubt I roused Wanderer from time to time, but could not distinctly make out, as he answered the call, whether or no it was a temporary spurt immediately preceding collapse, or whether the sage charger was restraining extraordinary effort, and economising the muscular forces until a time of need. A slight check at this critical stage gave us a few precious moments, while those who were fortunate enough to have second horses up took immediate advantage of the favourable change. Ainslie adopted a muscular bay, toned down to an elaborate fineness, which would have done no discredit to a starter for the 'Leger,' while Aymer bestowed himself on an extravagant chestnut of such size and quality as betokened that, as to price, about three of them would spoil £2000. The regular big-stud men, some of whom numbered nearer twenty than ten hunters in their stables, were by this time on their second, and some heavy-weights on their third horses. I had the choice of taking on Wanderer or going home; the former I considered hazardous, but the latter course I felt to be impossible. *La garde meurt mais ne se rends pas.* A quick cast and we are off again, with the pace better than ever.

As we ascended a long, deceptive-stretching hill, which I detested cordially, as cruelly trying towards the end of a run, I saw a tall young fellow on a clever *brown* mare, whom I had more than once noticed

leaving the general line to make a successful 'nick,' turn suddenly to the left, and head for the next brook at a considerable angle. It had occurred to me before that he rode like a man who knew every inch of the country, possibly had been born hereabouts; so with sudden resolve I determined to back his opinion and save the unnecessary distance, which, assuming him to be right, the rest of the field was performing. I therefore departed with him on his voyage of discovery, keeping a parallel line respectably apart. As we approached the brook, we drew nearer to each other, and I made an ordinary remark. He stared vacantly at me without speaking, or appearing to have heard. But, as we closed on the water and crashed through a 'bullfinch,' he uttered a loud harsh cry, so strange that I gazed in astonishment. As I looked at his face again, I saw there the peculiar expression which once seen cannot be forgotten. He was deaf and dumb! Before I had time to recover from the shock of this unexpected discovery, we were at the brook, at which he rode with a recklessness which caused me to wonder whether he was not slightly deranged, to boot. The brown mare cleared it magnificently, and Wanderer, roused by the companionship, crossed it cleverly enough. We held on in our independent line, my strange companion having apparently no doubts or misgivings, until we passed a deserted cluster of farm buildings, beyond which was a wood. I noticed a strange gleam in the gloomy eyes of the 'wild huntsman,' who, to my fancy, began to resemble the spectre horseman of Burger's ballad, until I almost expected him to troll out, 'Hurrah! the dead ride fast.' Looking westward, I saw that the fox must have made his point, after describing a semicircle, for this identical cover; the hounds were swinging on to the line in a direction

which would give us a prominent and enviable position.

As I hustled Wanderer along with the most careful economy of his strength, compatible with the requisite amount of pace, the only thing that interfered with my feeling of triumph was the view of an unmistakable flight of rails between me and the edge of the wood, towards which the whole field, tolerably select by this time, was trending.

I knew that there were horses which, even when pretty well pumped out and rolling in their stride, could clear a last fence, as I had seen in more than one steeplechase. Strong in faith that Wanderer belonged to this favoured section, I rode carefully on, just reaching the rails as the hounds had slipped through, with the fox well in view. The 'dark companion' of Lenore once more uttered his unearthly cry as he charged the rails, while considerably to the right I could see Herbert Ainslie take it like a 'flying doe,' and Aymer Brandon setting the big chestnut going with the like intent and purpose. I took Wanderer by the head, and simulating a confidence I was far from feeling, sent him at the unfriendly timber. I felt a considerable bang performed on the top rail with both hind-legs, but he landed lightly as we took up our proud position in the very best society, simultaneously with the rolling over of the heroic 'Volpone' and his promiscuous partition, irrevocable as that of Poland. I looked round for my mysterious mate, and saw him sitting listlessly on the good brown mare, while she, alas! hung her head and raised a foreleg, as the blood dropped fast from a gash in her shoulder. It was a bad stake-wound, and had evidently been done in crossing the ragged fences, which I recollected to *have seen* near the old farm buildings. Before I could

ask for explanation or offer help, I saw a yeoman-looking person take the mare's rein in a decided way, and ride off with the unknown, passively assenting, towards the village. Him I never saw or heard of more, and I am ignorant to this day of his name, social position, or exact mental calibre. But I shall always feel under obligation to him, being fully persuaded that to his knowledge of the country, and intuitive perception of the destination of the fox, I owed my escape from the less enviable finale of Acton, who reached home in an exhausted condition, having led his horse several miles—*more Anglicanum*—on account of that luckless steed having cast a shoe.

'Rolf Boldrewood, by all that's wonderful!' said a voice that sounded familiar to my ear; 'why, where have you hidden yourself all this time? I heard you were in England, from Acton. What a fellow you are, not to have looked me up all this time! I often think of the jolly week's shooting I had at your place, Wargildah, and how I used to pot the kangaroo with the old rifle—I have it now. Capital fun it was, stalking them!'

'I really did intend to pay you one of my earliest visits, Lord Wharfedale,' I made answer, as a squarely-built florid man came through the crowd and greeted me most cordially; 'but you must make allowance for the desultory habits of a colonist. I have been over to Ireland, and have only just returned.'

'*That* explains it all,' he said; 'you fell in love there, of course, and used up your leave—every fellow does that; there's no help for it. I did myself, for one. But I'm not going to let you off now. I want to have a chat about old times at Wargildah. By Jove! it makes one feel young again to think of it. Come over to Wharfedale to-night. Acton is

stopping with me, and I've just secured Brandon and M'Callum.'

'Most happy; but how about our toggery?'

'Oh, I can send my man to Melton, and he'll be back in time for dinner. We're not particularly early people. Captain Boldrewood will come too, I hope. I met him in Calcutta as I was going back. It will save you a cold ride home.'

I was not sorry that this unexpected recognition had turned up. I did not look forward with pleasure to a longish ride to our stables at Melton, on a winter evening, at the dreary pace which is *de rigueur* in England after a day's hunting. At our old cattle-musters we used to ride hard, 'cutting out' on camp and what not, for a long summer day, and then think nothing of rattling home fifteen or twenty miles, best pace, by way of finishing up. I never saw a good horse the worse for it. Whether the constitutions of English horses or the lower temperature of the climate forbade these liberties, I know not. Still, it was clear that any one departing from the custom of riding home at a walk or slow trot after a day's hunting would have been regarded as an ignorant foreigner; and if his horse had happened to die subsequently, from any cause whatsoever, as an unfeeling brute, who deserved to smart pecuniarily and otherwise. So I felt especially gratified at the idea of slipping over quietly to Wharfedale, and renewing my acquaintance with its hospitable lord, who had sojourned in our tents whilom in the desert-land yclept Australia.

So we fared merrily enough over the few miles that intervened between the scene of the 'kill' and the old, old hall, which for centuries had sheltered the lords of Wharfedale, and soon found ourselves in the placid enjoyment of a well-lighted billiard-room, that best of

all country-house appendages for passing the time between the too early twilight and the august ceremony known as dinner.

There had been a game or two before the dressing-bell rang for the eight o'clock refection, during which we had the satisfaction of seeing our loose cash appropriated by Aymer Brandon. An Indian colonel, who was of the house party, fell a victim to Harold. He was a turn the better player, but fell off in brilliancy when challenged. So it was arranged that Brandon and Harold should have a game after dinner, when the ladies could witness the tournament, some of them being very fair artists themselves.

We were a tolerably large party at dinner, before which time, to my great relief, our wampum and feathers had arrived, so that we were enabled to enjoy the society of the fair friends and neighbours of Lady Wharfedale, who had, for the most part, been staying in the house. They were all keen about the day's hunting, in which they expressed a flattering amount of interest.

'What luck had you, Colonel Acton?' asked Lady Wharfedale; 'you are not looking very triumphant.'

'I should think not,' answered the gallant gunner; 'Boldrewood and I got away well together at the start, and I presume *he* saw something of the run. I was thrown out early in the day, found the bay mare had cast a shoe, and after walking half-a-dozen miles, *me voici!*'

'I think you did very well,' answered her ladyship reassuringly, 'quite brilliantly, indeed, considering——'

'Considering what?' asked the mystified warrior. 'It struck me the bay mare didn't care for the fencing much.'

'I'm sorry to say, Acton,' explained Wharfedale,

coming to the rescue, 'that that thick-headed second groom of mine made a stupid mistake, and gave you an old mare that my lady drives instead of another bay, "La Mexicana," said to jump no end. I gave the fellow such a rowing when I found out how he had mounted you.'

'Well, it was too bad, wasn't it?' said her ladyship plaintively; 'the poor thing is ever so old, and couldn't have been much of a hunter at her best.'

'Quite a confidential mount!' said Acton, bowing with mock humility. 'I must really insist on a written order from your ladyship in future, if Wharfedale is so careless in his stable management.'

'Were there any ladies out to-day,' asked Lady John Talbot, 'or had you it all to yourselves?'

'Didn't see one,' answered Lord Wharfedale; 'field looked quite melancholy. I was looking all about for Miss Tudor—she wasn't there, or Lady Anne, or the widow, or, of course, I should have seen them.'

'I have no doubt you would,' promptly returned her ladyship; 'but, after all, they can't hunt five days in the week. I think Carlie Tudor rides as well as any one in the county.'

'Or anywhere else!' affirmed an admiring squire. 'She is a light-weight, with splendid nerve, so nothing stops her.'

'I'm not so sure of that, eh, Brandon?' said our host; 'we've seen a hunt or two in your country together, when the leaps were high, awfully stiff, and without much relief in the way of brooks and hedges. What was the name of that lady who used to sail away with the front rankers—wonderful straight goer she was?'

'That was "the ladye in grey," as we all called her,' said Brandon; 'she had a way of making her horse love timber, not to be easily acquired. It was no

joke to be her escort for the day, and many a man has placed a rattling fall to her account after feeling it impossible to decline, because "the ladye" led the way.'

'It's a pity we can't ask her here, or go over to Australia to her,' said Lady John Talbot. 'I should like, above all things, to see some of these women who crow over the rest of us, surpassed in turn; I suppose it's unamiable, but I *should* enjoy seeing your friend cut them down.'

'I don't know that the lady we mentioned would enter into the matter of rivalry,' said Brandon; 'she is simply one of those people who have a natural talent for hunting, as other people have for painting, novel-writing, or lawn tennis; and she exercises it as unobtrusively as if riding over nearly five foot of stiff timber was as easy as the piano, and as customary as needle-work.'

'One of the biggest fences I ever saw was taken by another lady in an Australian hunting-field, under the very circumstances you describe,' said I; 'and, by the way, you might have seen her, Wharfedale, for the Ffonts lived close by where we had the kangaroo battues that you remember so well.'

'And was she an Australian?' asked Lady John.

'Yes, by birth, rearing, and education; but she came of an old Galway family, which, I suppose, accounts for the hunting proclivities.'

'And was she such a wonderful horsewoman?' asked Lady Wharfedale. 'How high was the fence?'

'It was this way,' said I: 'the hounds were absolutely racing; there had been a succession of stiff rails, all of which had been taken by a select few. They came to a fence, of which part had been smashed, showing a stiff top-rail, nearer five feet than four. "For Heaven's

sake, Miss Ffont," said her cavalier, Jack Villiers, "don't go at that fence—it is higher than it looks." *La belle dame sans merci* looked reprovingly at him; he was brave, but middle-aged, and a parent; and then, riding straight for the post, like Assheton Smith, sent "The Disowned" over it, with a foot to spare. Jack went *over* too. When he arose, words failed him.'

'What a trump of a girl!' said Lady Wharfedale. 'I should like to see her and Charlie Tudor in one field with the gate locked, and a big double out of it. My hunting days are over, but I still think a gallop over grass the grandest sensation in the world.'

'You ought to have gone to Australia with me, Helen,' said Wharfedale; 'that's the place for grass. Only we were not married then—I forgot that. Fancy! endless forest parks with turf so firm, and timber so open, that you can gallop for hours with a free rein, or drive four-in-hand without picking your road.'

'Oh, what a delightful country!' said one of the young ladies; 'what a pity it's so far off!'

'Yes, it's a long way from *town*, as a wandering plunger said,' admitted Brandon; 'that's the worst of it. However, Miss Arundel, when wool is a good price we can come to you, so the distance difficulty is obviated.'

'I am not sure of that,' returned the young lady. 'I have a cousin out there who has been away for years, and he has not made a fortune, or come home, or anything.'

'Fortune of war; perhaps you'll see him next year a regular nabob.'

After dinner it was decided by her ladyship that we should adjourn to the billiard-room for a game of *pool*; afterwards to see the match at billiards between Harold and Aymer Brandon. We had a cheerful

contest for the pool, wherein several of the ladies distinguished themselves. Then we arranged ourselves around, and the battle began. Harold had been a crack player from his Eton days, and while in India had, like other subs, devoted himself to pale ale and billiards as the principal alleviations granted by Providence for the solace of soldiers in that land of the sun. By nature cool, he prided himself (his sisters said) upon the impossibility of shaking his nerve; he had been matched too by no means unequally with some of the best players of the day. Brandon was known by *us* to be a cue somewhat of the surest. Harold's reputation was Anglo-Indian.

There is no better indoor game than that of billiards. It admits of the strong excitement which a game, principally of skill, though not free from the fluctuations of chance, affords to the actual performers. At the same time, when the players are above average calibre, there is no lack of interest felt by the spectators. The apartment in which the game is played in a private house has a kind of green-room adaptation to the lighter pleasantries, and is favourable to badinage and mild flirtation. Therefore, in a country house full of guests, few rooms are more popular, and none more favourably regarded by host and hostess as tending to easy entertainment, and the utilisation of fragments of spare time.

For the first fifty points the game was 'two hundred up'; Harold had rather the advantage, making brilliant breaks and scoring rapidly. I thought Brandon played carelessly; but I knew that he had a fancy for 'coming at the distance,' and that being at the lead, or otherwise, made no difference to *him*. His face would have been as calm, his eye as steadfastly aglow, his hand as true, had he been standing *à la barrière* with

an antagonist before him never known to miss or to spare. Had it been his doom, like Crescentius, he would have

> Bent beneath the headsman's stroke
> With an uncovered eye.

No man ever met Aymer Brandon who would have coupled the idea of failure, or faltering, in aught that man can do—in war, love, or pastime—with that most popular of heroes.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

So we Australians, with a reasonable proportion of the fair spectators, backed him in our mild gambling, and, despite of Harold's increasing popularity, looked for him to win our bets by some strong *coup* at the finish.

'Your cousin is brilliant,' said Wharfedale to me; 'but I have seen Brandon play before, and I prefer to back him until I know more about his antagonist's strength. You never can say he has lost the game until the last point is scored.'

'Who'll give three to two on the player?' said Jack M'Callum, as Harold, with a neat seven-stroke, scored a hundred and seventy to his antagonist's hundred and forty-nine.

'Taken!' said half-a-dozen voices promptly, and the bets were booked. Among the ladies each combatant had his supporters. Harold's dark, delicately-cut features, and *fierté* of manner, coupled with his *obvious* lead, secured him a numerous *clientèle;* while *the cool* bearing and Grand Seignior air with which

Aymer moved among us lesser men, converted others into staunch believers.

'I suppose I ought to help the weaker side,' said Lady Wharfedale, 'if one can apply the term to Mr. Brandon, so I shall back him.'

'I'm a follower of Captain Boldrewood's,' said Lady John Talbot; 'I can't desert the army. What do you say, Miss Arundel; do you like soldiers?'

'I don't see that I'm called upon to say just now,' replied that young lady, 'which service I prefer, but I shall back Mr. Brandon.'

'Very well, get your gloves ready. Good gracious! what's that?'

This exclamation was caused by a general expression of satisfaction or dismay, as Brandon, commencing with an exceedingly unlikely five-stroke, got the balls favourably placed, and made a big break, scoring level with Harold. Then the play began to assume an almost painful intensity of interest. Every stroke was watched eagerly, and Harold, who particularly disliked being beaten in anything, played in the most deliberate and careful manner. Having lost his unquestioned lead, I fancied that he did not play with such *élan* as before; though no skill seemed wanting, the inspiration seemed gone. Brandon played and moved without the slightest change of gesture, or expression. With strange uniformity they scored nearly alike, until, at a hundred and ninety-five all, Harold, dwelling a trifle too long upon his stroke, missed it. As Brandon sauntered round to the corner, he said, 'Who bets that I don't make a five-stroke?'

'I should not have offered to bet on your stroke,' answered Harold; 'but as you propose the wager, I'll lay you twenty to ten you don't do it.'

'Any one else?' asked Brandon indolently.

'Take me,' said Colonel St. Lawrence and several others; 'I always lay against a man that is going to play; the odds are that he misses a last winning stroke.'

'All noted,' said Brandon; 'and now——'

He looked at the balls, and without the slightest appearance of care or haste played as if he had been practising with a marker. He 'holed the red and cannoned.'

'One hundred, ninety-five—game!' pronounced the honorary marker; 'and well played too.'

'There!' said Lady Wharfedale; 'see what comes of judicious encouragement. Mr. Brandon improved directly I bet upon him. Miss Arundel was of my way of thinking, too, and see what a lot of gloves she has won. Captain Boldrewood, I thought you were going to win—I did indeed. You've been an expense to Lady John, I'm afraid; see how melancholy she looks.'

Wharfedale Hall was something more than a fine country house, with a handsome park, and extensive, well-kept grounds. With establishments of this kind I was tolerably well acquainted. But this was a grand historic keep which had stood sieges of Roundheads, and perhaps scarcely less damaging periods of occupation by the wild Cavaliers of Goring and Prince Rupert, one party of which, at the finish of a mad carouse, had nearly succeeded in burning it to the ground. A place of honour, of strength, of note from earliest Saxon days, the towers of Wharfedale had nourished successive generations of the family, which, though narrowly saved from extinction more than once, had never abandoned the direct line. It possessed the charms of a buried past, a hoar antiquity, joined to the luxury and completeness of modern days. You could pace the

cloisters at the western angle of Egbert's tower, where, in furred gown and sables, the piratical Earl Witikind was said to have meditated upon the endowment, after a voyage of unusual profit, of the neighbouring abbey, which, darkly massive among its ghostly yew trees, still looked sternly upon the cavalcades which ever and anon trooped past the gates.

You could pass from these time-worn attestations to the history of the past, to my lady's rose garden, a marvel of velvet lawn, and showers of newly-invented prize blooms, with Italian terraces and vases daily filled by such flower-wealth as the dwellers in towns rarely dream of. You could wander over a tennis-ground like a live billiard-table, and disport yourself among the freshest feminine flowerets of the day decked in the most fatal costumes. But for *atra cura* life would pass here as in the gardens of Armida, an enchanted realm from which the ruder details of humanity seemed as effectually banished as arithmetic from a cathedral, or economy from a *salon* at Homburg.

The stables, to which I found my way in an early morning ramble—a necessity from old habit—composed a handsome pile of buildings forming a great quadrangle. It was plain to see, although not exactly early English, that they had been commenced on their present scale of royal magnificence more than one generation since, and had not been finished until a comparatively recent period. Such was the fact. Algernon Lord Wharfedale, a favoured friend of the Regent, had expended several fair manors as well as the ready money available from the estates, coal-mines, and deer forests, in keeping up the pace of the period, and so on. The completion of the stables, commenced by his grandfather, was postponed till a run of better luck set in for the family. His son had a life-work cut out

for him in paying off mortgages; and now, partly from judicious management, partly from a rise in value of the coal and iron mines, in which the house had always been rich, here was the present monarch fairly seated on the throne of his ancestors with a magnificent income, and health, strength, and spirits to enjoy it. I do not know whether persons in his position are to be unconditionally envied. But, if so, here was the very man—not past middle age, with a famous constitution, a tolerant temperament, abundance of energy, and a large share of that reasonable obstinacy which renders the possessor fairly satisfied with his circumstances, his opinions, his family, and all that is his. I hold such a mental constitution to be a possession of priceless value. The lack of it deprives existence of an ingredient which represents the indispensable chemical complement, without which the progress of decay cannot be arrested. No man is less useful in society, less valuable as a citizen, than he whose will is unnerved, whose energy is sapped by a pernicious indifferentism. Too philosophical to care much about himself, he distrusts his own opinions. He is too flaccid, or too cold even for harmless vanity. But caring little for himself, he cares *nothing* for you, his acquaintance or neighbour. He is unamusing as unamusable, and sinks into a premature grave after a lifelong protest against his Maker and his kind.

Such a man, at any rate, was *not* Reginald Geoffrey Raoul de Foulke, Earl of Wharfedale. If he had been the veriest of parvenus, he could not have been savoured with fuller enjoyment of the good things of his pleasant heritage. He had travelled much; had seen, voluntarily, a good deal of the rough side of life, laying down his title and its accompanying prestige in lands where it suited his humour to be unattached.

In the course of his wanderings he had 'done' the Australian colonies and New Zealand. He had shared the hospitalities of squatters; had ridden long days beneath the burning sun of the great salt-bush land, and smoked his pipe by camp fires, on the granite-strewn beaches of the Snowy River, where the shadow of the Australian Alps falls on stupendous glens and lonely mountain parks. He had seen the sunrise tinge with delicate hues the peaks and glaciers of Maori-land, and eaten *kumeras* baked by the frank maidens of Waikato, in *whares* formed of giant fern stems. He had crossed flooded Australian rivers upon tremulous bark canoes, and seen the rough red gold picked out of the face of drives a thousand feet from upper air. He had galloped into his camp of trappers and half-breed hunters, with a band of yelling Sioux Indians at his heels, bent upon 'raising h'ar,' and barely baulked of their prey. He had floated down the charmed lake in that loveliest lotus-land, Cashmere. He had ridden hard for 'first spear' among the plains and nullahs of Hindostan, and left a remembered name among the men who love the *burra shikar*.

And amid all these various scenes and companionships he had ever borne himself as a man among men. Simple and unaffected in manner, he was resolute and daring to recklessness when danger was to be faced, or sport secured. More by the absence of aught derogatory to the *rôle* of *gentilhomme* in speech or deed, than by any lofty peculiarity of manner, erroneously supposed to be the attribute of aristocrats, could the lord of fair Wharfedale be identified as a member of that privileged class, which is regarded by some with adulation, by others with jealousy, by none with indifference. As a rule, though there are occasional exceptions, men are truly judged by their social equals, and by these the

verdict recorded in the case of Lord Wharfedale was, that 'he was a good man all round, and a gentleman to the tips of his finger-nails.'

'I shall always think that my *wanderjahre* did me a world of good,' he said to us in the smoking-room that night. 'It enables a man to correct crude ideas about his own position and dimensions. One valuable result I take to be the opportunity I have had of judging of the national character under widely differing conditions.'

'And what decision have you come to?' I inquired; 'you have had a tolerably wide survey.'

'Simply this: that the men of our race, Anglo-Saxons and Anglo-Celts, are essentially the same in the root qualities of the breed everywhere. One country may differ from another in climate—colder here, hotter there, more niggers, and fiercer in one place than another — and so on; democrat here, Downing Street there, but Britons and their sons are alike everywhere. Alike in stubborn adherence to a limited formula—honour or success first; toil, adventure, danger, death itself—all in the day's work.'

'But I take it, Lord Wharfedale,' said Harold, 'that your philosophical reflections gradually pointed to England, and some locality not far from this particular one, as being about the most desirable residence for the descendant of the Norseman, and so on.'

'Well—perhaps, yes; but, upon my soul! when a fellow is young and untamed, and all that kind of thing, I don't know whether I wouldn't rather have a dozen years fighting Russians and Pandies, like you, or the fun of taking up new country, and an occasional brush with bushrangers, like Brandon and M'Callum.'

'I can understand *your* feeling,' I said; 'but such a want is not general among men of your order.'

'Possibly it isn't always expressed. I know when I came of age, I was in some slight danger of losing my appetite from over-cookery. I had everything I wanted until I began to want nothing. Before any abnormal symptoms supervened, a craving for travel took possession of me—the cure was complete and permanent. I have had the unspeakable advantage of experiencing in my own proper person the sensations of heat, thirst, cold, danger, and even hunger—not for any great length of time, I am happy to say. *Haec olim meminisse*, etc. When I look back on these contrasts, it really refreshes me, and I feel doubly appreciative of this—well—not very bad sort of thing. I do a little county business, attend the House when in session, overlook my stewards, plant a little, drain a little, hunt a good deal, and don't find the day a quarter of an hour too long.'

. . . . .

We spent our allotted time with great comfort and content, having a fair share of luck in the hunting-field, and making merry with discretion, in the very pleasant society which the town of Melton-Mowbray affords during the hunting season. There was a tone of good fellowship among the *habitués* which suited our tastes, while the Australian contingent, all known to each other, personally or by repute, was sufficiently large to render us comparatively independent of external aid. Whist was always procurable, billiards formed a never-failing resource, while a hunt ball from time to time collected the available county families and tended to more intimate acquaintance. We had no reason to complain of want of occupation during the inevitable frosts, which put a stopper upon field work and sent the metropolitan brigade back to town, like a flight of migratory birds. But February, with its proportion of good hunting

weather, with intervals of dark days and driving sleet storms, came to an end, and as the great Illingford tournament was to be held in March, we determined to fall back upon our base of operations, and betake ourselves to the calm delights and hospitable shelter of Boldrewood Chase.

About this time I found among my Australian letters a missive in the characteristic hand of an infrequent correspondent, and a foreboding came over me as I opened my father's letter. That respected senior was not given to writing, except upon occasions of moment; I guessed that something out of the ordinary run of events had happened, nor was I mistaken. The letter ran thus—

BOLDREWOOD, N.S.W.
10th November 186—.

MY DEAR ROLF—I shall be sorry if your trip be curtailed, but matters are becoming serious, and bad times are at hand for all stockholders. Prices are falling fast—wool, as you are aware, is down; stock are unsaleable. The banks are nervous, and the season threatens to be the worst known since 1838. Here we are only in the second week of November, and the country looks frightful. The frontage is bare *now*, and what the runs will look like in June, if the season holds dry, none can tell. Of course we are not pushed *as yet*, but I foresee the need of all hands and heads to stave off heavy loss, perhaps ruin. I do not croak, as you know; but we cannot afford to lose your help in the crisis that *must* come. Eric is rather young, and I am getting old for back-country work. I shall be glad to see your face again, my boy. You must finish your travels in better times. Send out some Bates' shorthorns, and a horse or two. We are not so hard run yet as to economise in *that* way.—I remain your loving father, ERIC BOLDREWOOD.

P.S.—Thank my brother for his kindness to you—on my account—and tell him that if wool ever touches half-a-crown again, I will beat up his quarters at the old Chase.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THIS was decisive. I had got the route without a shadow of doubt. I knew too well that my staunch old governor had, if anything, understated the case. I felt that he entertained the worst opinion of the state of the barometer, financially and otherwise. There was no help for it. I saw myself a passenger by the March mail. Luckily, it was a week or ten days after the Illingford meeting, so that I should not have to relinquish the last hazard upon which I had set my heart. That over, I felt that I could turn my back upon England for a season, not only with resignation but with satisfaction.

. . . . . .

At the Chase once more! At home; for such it was, as far as Britain was concerned, and such will it ever be in my dreams. We received the Prodigal's welcome, and were spoiled and petted after a fashion only possible to women, when so minded, careless as they frequently are as to the merit of the recipients. Githa brightened up to unwonted enthusiasm, her safely-secured warrior notwithstanding, while a tear rose in Gwen's glad eyes as she ran down to meet us at the entrance to the hall.

'Welcome—so welcome home, Harold; and—you, also, monsieur—so "behold you of return," as Florac says. We were fast becoming Marianas in the moated grange—that is, only for Githa's property in the Major, and I am afraid we teased him and papa occasionally. And now, tell us everything. You did not write half often enough, but we heard of you now and then.'

'Indeed! Well, we *are* back—that is the most important fact at present,' said Harold, who received his sister's caresses with the unprejudiced calmness of a brother. 'Governor quite well? and may I be allowed to dress for dinner? I assure you, we have dined with the utmost regularity during our absence, and we are tired, hungry, and, particularly Rolf, very cross.'

'Rolf doesn't get cross, either before dinner or after—that I know of,' pouted the impatient girl; 'only you spoiled Indians are given to that. But I won't muddle away the interest of your adventures now. Go and dress, and come back fresh and smiling.'

'Don't believe him, Gwen,' I interposed; 'he was quite enthusiastic coming up the avenue, and as eager to get home as—I was myself.'

We were a merry party at dinner that evening. My uncle had returned from one of his visits to the county town, and was as proud and pleased as if Harold had come back from Eton for his holidays.

'I heard of you, boys, from my old friend FitzWalter, who met you at Wharfedale. He said you all went very straight, and that there were some countrymen of yours, Rolf, who were hard men to beat across country—heavy weights too.'

'He was right about that,' assented Harold, who was unusually cheery; 'the Walers went like birds, I must say, and some of them can give away a stone or two in other noble exercises.'

'Billiards, to wit,' said Gwen mischievously, having been instructed by me in a confidential chat. 'Why didn't you bring some of them back with you? But no—I think I'd sooner have you both to ourselves for a short season.'

'What, Harold! the great gun of the Byculla Club, and the Simla unapproachable, taken as a prey by a

colonist?' asked the Major, with affected incredulity—'not possible? Was Minnie Arundel taking a painful interest in the game, or was it only Wharfedale's Madeira? The last is a fair excuse for any man.'

'Now, Guy!' said Githa, coming to the rescue; 'I won't have you tease Harold in that way. Perhaps it was only a fluke; and it's very rude of you to put Madeira before Minnie as the reason—Harold is never nervous, and *never* takes too much wine.'

'Or does anything else that's wrong in his sister's eyes—eh, old lady? But this Aymer Brandon seems a cool hand, and plays like a book. Better luck next time.'

'You will find your steeplechaser very forward in his preparation, Rolf,' said my uncle. 'If care and hard work can make a horse win, he would be sure of it. I never saw a trainer before who seemed so thoroughly to identify himself with his work. He begins to look fine-drawn himself.'

'That dear Emerald shines like a star,' affirmed Gwen. 'I feel sure he *must* win, and I shall back him to the verge of ruin. We must all go and see him after breakfast.'

'I intended to pay him an earlier visit,' I said; 'but if we are to make a call upon him in form, I will wait. Jim will feel flattered, and I owe him a compliment.'

'How are you for weight?' said the Major. 'It won't do to give any away at Illingford. Some of the gentlemen jocks at that annual pot are exceedingly clever fellows, and you'll want every card in your hand when you play with them.'

'I shall be pretty near the right thing. I can wind up a little tighter for the next week or two, and then not be over the twelve stone eight that Emerald has to carry.'

Next morning we all marched down to the stable, headed by the Squire, and found Jim cheerfully prepared, but with a thoughtful expression as becoming to one who supported the stupendous responsibility of a horse in training for a great race.

He threw off the coverings with an air of pride, and permitted us to gaze upon the satin skin and perfect symmetry of his distinguished charge.

'There, sir!' he said; 'he looks pretty fit; and if he ain't, you couldn't get another hand's turn out of this child if you was to boil me down. He's a first-rate doer; and his temper is that fine, that what he gets he keeps. If all goes well on the eighteenth, he'll just be about concert pitch, and not a pound too high nor too low.'

'His looks show you have done your best for him, Jim,' said I. 'No horse could have come on better in the time, and I hardly expected to see him so forward. He looks quite a different animal.

'Like all Britishers,' I continued, 'more than one strain of blood runs in his veins, and he has the vigour of mixed races, when all are good. Look at his delicate springy pasterns, his grand back rib, his muscular shoulders, his iron legs and feet; all these he has from his desert ancestors; while his size, his pace, his ability to act under weight, he inherits from his grandsire Tramp, and his greater ancestors Whalebone and Dick Andrews—direct descendants of Eclipse.'

'Why did they ever let him go out of India?' said Major Wyndham; 'people are always clamouring for that kind of horse all over the world, and especially there. Big enough, handsome, fast, quiet, sound! What a fool a man is that ever parts with a horse that has once been proved to be all that.'

'Perhaps his owner couldn't help himself. Accidents

will happen. He was out of condition when I bought him, and I suppose you will agree with me that not more than about one man in a hundred knows a good horse when he sees him.'

'In the whole range of philosophy few things are more certain than that proposition,' he answered heartily.

There was nothing now left but to enjoy to the uttermost the companionship which I was so soon to quit for an indefinite period. Harold, after a few days spent with his people, affirmed that business required his presence in London, and departed for that huge aggregation of luxury and squalor, where the pageantry of wealth, the combatants of labour, and the suppliants of sorrow mingle in ceaseless procession under the sombre sky of a northern winter.

Depressed by the prospect of my approaching farewell to the pleasant old Chase, and the kind hearts of its inmates, I was minded to linger amidst its ancient woods to the last. I knew that with the necessity for action, and the first bugle-notes of the advance, all the old feelings proper to the battle and the bivouac would return. I had made trial of them too often to doubt their prompt obedience in the hour of need. And I felt no imprudence, therefore, in deliberately abandoning myself to the last season of solace and repose which fate was likely to yield, perhaps for long years.

'How happily the days of Thalaba went by!' With the Squire or the Major and the girls I explored the historic localities—and they were many—that the neighbourhood afforded. When the weather was unpropitious we spent the mornings in the old-fashioned but well-stocked library, reading aloud by turns from our favourite authors, and indulging in animated debates over the literary pundits of the day.

whose wares were regularly forwarded in weekly consignments by that great and good arch-librarian Mudie. I reviewed occasionally, for the edification of the company, a work upon Australia—indicating the errors which, save in a few honourable instances, abound in the fiction, philosophy, or mere travel which have honoured that far land by selection as a subject. Or we compared notes as to our especial heroes and heroines in the greater and the lesser lights of fiction, beginning with Sir Walter and ending with George Eliot. When taking a poetical fit, we ranked ourselves in opposing forces as to the beauties of Tennyson, the Brownings, Owen Meredith, Swinburne, and the Rossettis. We ran lightly and with occasional lack of reverence, perhaps, over the gamut of song, romance, history, and the drama in our desultory conversaziones. Still, they were occasionally so engrossing that the luncheon-bell more than once announced unexpectedly that the morning had fled, and that inroad had been made upon the rapidly lessening hours that remained to me.

'And so you've had your leave cut short, my boy,' said the Squire one morning at breakfast, 'and will have to start directly after the great race? My brother seems in a hurry; but I suppose he knows his own affairs best, and would not send for you unless there was need.'

'Rest assured of it, sir,' I said. 'He is not an alarmist; I feel certain that I shall find them all hard at work reefing sail or throwing over cargo to lighten the ship when I get back. It's lucky I can manage to see our race over before I start.'

'Well, yes, I suppose it is, as you have set your heart upon it; though I don't think it will hasten your journey back if you get a bad fall, and break a bone. *How* would that be?'

'I shall take no interest in the race at all now,' said Gwen with a melancholy air, 'as Rolf is going away directly afterwards. I can't see why Uncle Eric and the other cousins can't manage their share of sheep and what's-y-names without dragging you back into the wilderness.'

'Bad style of thing, this going foreign, isn't it, Gwen?' said the Major, with sympathetic tenderness of tone, as he looked meaningly at the calmly happy face of Githa. 'I shall have to be off to that hateful place India before a year's out, and somebody will be left lamenting—eh, child?'

'I will go too,' said Githa stoutly. 'I never, *never* will be left behind *again*.'

'That's very devoted, and all that, old lady! but wait till you've been a year or two there—if you by any wonderful accident do go out—and we shall see you cutting away to Simla and leaving your beloved Guy to take his chance of heat and fever on the plains, or coming home to worry the governor here and declining to return. All Indian wives settle down to the same style of thing in the end.'

Githa did not reply; but as she fixed her clear blue eyes upon the face of her future lord, there was such a mute appeal in the tender depths that the cheerful soldier was abashed, and hasted to recant and sue for pardon.

'Well, there are women and women, even in India. I was only chaffing. Queen Adelgitha shall ride on an elephant, and have a hundred slaves to minister to her slightest wish. India isn't so bad if you get a cool station; only I wish I might never set eyes on a palanquin or a nigger again, as long as I live! Perhaps Gwen would like to pay us a visit—eh?'

But Gwen had retired.

CHAPTER XL

IN spite of the blustering weather we got about to many a scene of historic interest. We saw the sites of ancient villages, and even more pretentious settlements, of which the scant, grey, time-worn relics alone told the tale of how

> The ruthless conqueror threw down,
> Woe worth the deed, that little town
> To lengthen out his Chase.

Together we saw the Lyndhurst oaks and the giant beeches of Mark Ash for the last time. We ruffled the dead leaves in the long straight avenues of the woods of Great Huntley, and saw the wild swine grubbing in the New Forest for acorns and beech-mast, as doubtless they did in the days of Gurth and Wamba.

The last day we devoted to Canterton Glen, and as the twilight faded, fancy once more clothed the sighing woods with bud and leaf, listened to the shout of the Red King, as he bade his follower, with a wild oath, to shoot and fear not, and heard the hoof-echoes of Walter Tyrrell's horse as he rode hard for the ford on the Avon. Ah, those were pleasant days! It strikes me now that in the unresting eagerness of youth I scarce did justice to the garnered lore, the varying interest, the halcyon calm which glorified the charmed time, when for a 'little season of love and joy' the demons of change and care had no power for evil.

Even now, as happy and successful I pen these careless lines, which yet record the too-swiftly succeed-

ing acts of that oldest melodrama, 'Human Life' (in which the players, curiously like other actors, often fail to learn their allotted parts, and make the wildest work with the proper emphasis), I wonder at the frame of mind in which I terminated, perhaps for ever, my sojourn at 'Joyous Guard,' known to men as Boldrewood Chase.

. . . . . .

And now the intervening weeks had sped, and the very eve of the great annual gathering had come. 'In that behalf,' as lawyers say, all things had been prosperous. Jim and his charge had been sent on by rail previously, and that cautious servitor, unwilling like most trainers to make too sure of success, had yet committed himself to the statement that 'Emerald was as fit as ever he was in his life; and those that could show him the way would have to make good time, and jump a trifle too.'

I had got rid of a certain proportion of unnecessary tissue, and as the actual hour of the ceremony approached, I felt that if I did not win, I should be able to show my kinsfolk and the public what the horses and men 'from the other side of the world' resembled.

It so befell that on the 20th of March the whole family circle from the Chase found themselves at Illingford. The Squire brought the drag and four, on which Harold enacted waggoner, and coached us over without peril or adventure. When we got there the town was more than full—it chiefly is on the eve of its particular festival; but on this occasion people seemed to have arrived from all known parts and unfrequented corners of the habitable globe.

There appeared to be more swells than usual from London, from Scotland, from Ireland, even from Paris.

Goldstein and long Kenrickson had turned up from the pleasant city, where they had been living in the Rue de Bellechasse until they were less English than French in their ways and habits. Calthorne, last seen at Rome—*he* was here; Bunter, Strongbowe, Thomson (of Thomson Brothers—*venerabile nomen*), Charlie Templemore—chestnuts and all; they were there, with heaps of Australians that I 'knew of' but with whom I was not personally acquainted; Norman Leslie and a quiet English-looking cousin, who subsequently turned out to be the chief of a clan, and as pronounced a Highlander as M'Tavish.

'Why, Norman,' said I, 'this is a sort of Battle of Dorking! Are you certain that the Melbourne volunteers and the military forces of Sydney have not coalesced and invaded Britain? Whence otherwise this amazing glut of Walers?'

'The fact is, dear old boy,' said he, 'that it leaked out somehow that there was an Australian horse going for the race, and as some of us had heard of Emerald before, we managed to get on a bit, while his price was reasonable. But they say Rochelle is queer, and your horse has gone up to a pretty short price, so if you haven't invested in time, you're late.'

'Thank you for the tip, Norman, but I had word from my fellow, Jim Whitby—you remember Jim? However, I have put on as much as will pay my expenses, and something to spare, if he pulls it off, and won't ruin me if he don't.'

'Well, I wish you luck, old fellow! Do you remember that terrible finish we had at Wargildah, when Goshawk and Zingara both fell at the last fence; Goshawk broke his neck, and that beggar Potterley *cantered* in and won easily.'

'We were young then, Norman,' said I, 'and foolish;

I can answer for myself. I don't think I shall be quite so rash this time; but you can't tell with a field of twenty-four in a race like this how one may have to ride at the finish. M'Callum and Brandon anywhere?'

'Saw them walking down the street yesterday. Brandon says he stands to win on Emerald as much as will give him a winter in Rome and a summer at St. Petersburg. Intends to make an exhaustive and comprehensive foreign tour, entirely out of the proceeds of his winnings.'

'If he gets them,' said I. 'But I wish you fellows had not stuck to me so pluckily; I shan't ride any the better for carrying such a pot of money.'

'Nonsense, Rolf, haven't I seen you fight a race out of the fire before now? Remember that one at Port Western, when the Don baulked at the last fence but one—he was always a brute for baulking—and you had to race home and caught Dunmore and Watkyn at the post, winning by a head. There's no girl in the case, is there? because I shall think there is some disturbing element if I hear Rolf Boldrewood talk about being nervous.'

'Heard anything about Phantom?'

'Yes, he's meant; and Thorncroft is the first gentleman-jock in England. Captain Enderby takes the mare, so that, independently of twenty others of the best horsemen in the kingdom, you will have to do your private and particular best.'

I spent the evening quietly *en famille*, resisting the temptation of a dinner to which I was invited by Brandon, to meet Templemore, Leslie, and divers of our ancient *camaraderie*, and so

> They in whose wars I had borne a part,
> They whom I loved with a brother's heart,

were constrained to keep it up without me. I was

minded to come to the post next morning with the clear head and unimpaired nerve which no man needs more than he who essays to bear his colours successfully 'over the sticks.'

Those gallant *viveurs* transacted their entertainment without me, and, 'Roederer' and 'verve Clicquot' notwithstanding, turned out bravely arrayed, in good time to view the saddling-up as well as to pick up such portion of the odds as might seem to them desirable.

'There's a big field to face the starter with,' said Harold, as we sat at dinner very cosily at that particular snug, old-fashioned hotel, the 'Wavertree Arms,' where we had secured rooms some weeks before; 'it is one comfort that you will have a fit horse, for I never saw anything look more "pink," thanks to that untiring henchman of yours. Never saw such a fellow to work, sober as a Brahmin too, and as vigilant as a Skye terrier. I'll be sworn that no horse is "got at" that he has charge of.'

'I think not,' I acquiesced complacently; 'he has been sleeping in Emerald's box ever since he has been in the land of the tout and the "slaves of the ring," with his revolver handy. He wouldn't think twice about letting drive at a skulker.'

'I don't know whether there's anything up, but Emerald has gone down a point or two in the betting since yesterday. I invested another tenner or two, as the market was tempting.'

'What a pity it seems,' said Gwen indignantly, 'that there can be no racing without betting. I am afraid that some of the poor horses will be lamed or killed before to-morrow night, perhaps some of the riders,' she added tremulously; 'and to think that all this danger of life and limb is to be the subject of cold-*blooded* wagers! It is too heartless.'

'My dear Gwen,' quoth the Major, 'nobody's horse will fall an ounce the heavier for having a pot of money on or against him; and as for Rolf here—your health and luck, old fellow—if he does win, won't it be rather pleasant, on the whole, for him to be able to pay for his jolly trip, and take out no end of presents to his people, all out of the speed and pluck of a Waler and his own good riding? Wish I could do it, eh, Githa?'

'As much glory as you like, Guy,' said the gentle Githa, 'but I agree with Gwen in disliking the money part. It sounds mercenary.'

'Deuced awkward, I daresay,' murmured the Major indistinctly, as he emptied his glass, 'pulling off the National at longish odds. However, if Rolf wins, you must arrange about forgiving us all afterwards.'

The day was fine, *grace à Dieu*—that is, as fine as the season and the latitude would admit of—as Harold rattled us down to Aintree in such form as put all in good spirits. I, for one, would rather perform any hazardous deed of 'derring do' in the light of the sun, preferring a reasonable amount of caloric as cheering to the soul, and comforting to the complex organism that we call man. I have seen a steeplechase ridden between the commencement and the end of a fearful thunderstorm, when the lightning played weirdly amid the bits and stirrup-irons, and the thunder-peals roared like parks of artillery, as the horses raced at the big jumps across a course like a water-meadow. Most exciting, but scarcely agreeable; I incline to a still day, not over-brilliant, but free from wind or driving showers, more especially as the silken and gay attire, immemorially sacred to such occasions, is rather of the thinnest. I was therefore gratified to discover, on my very early acquaintance with the fateful day, that my

violet and golden habiliments were likely to receive no rough treatment, save from accidental occurrences.

. . . . . .

Half-past twelve, and the saddling-bell rings. I begin to peel off overcoats and leggings, and stand forth in the carefully-considered rig proper to the occasion. Two distinguished London artists are responsible for my leathers and tops, and as I stroll forth towards the scales, I feel that from cap to spur-rowel I am equal to any criticism that may be directed against my *personnel.*

Brandon and M'Callum are in the stand with our party, having been introduced on the arrival of the drag, and I know by the gratified look upon the girls' bright faces that Master Aymer is creating a favourable impression by narrating to Gwen some of my earlier performances in other tourneys, and predicting romantic successes in this encounter. Leslie is by my side, to aid Jim in preliminary arrangements, and ready to perform any of those indispensable services which seem inevitable at a steeplechase. There is always another girth to be obtained, a pound or two of dead weight, a saddle-cloth, a martingale, or something which can only be procured at the last moment, for which the friend of the stable rides at ostentatious speed as if carrying a cartel from a monarch, or, as Eothen has it, from the devil to the archangel Michael.

CHAPTER XLI

A VAST crowd was collected at Aintree, where the great northern people delights to mass itself, what

time Illingford Spring Meeting comes round, and the Illingford Grand National gives them a taste of the 'circenses,' dear as of old to the plebs, from the possibility of life being spilt in the rough game. The *panem* in these degenerate days they have to find for themselves. I could not help contrasting the aspect of the great array of *ouvriers* with that of an Australian crowd, and pointed it out to Norman Leslie.

'Very evident,' said he, 'that these fellows think once a week quite often enough to wash—you couldn't see them look like that in Melbourne or Sydney, or even at the wildest bush village, where the prizes consisted of a bridle and saddle, and perhaps a silver-mounted whip.'

'There's a look of power and intelligence about these faces, grimy as many of them are,' said I; 'but does it not strike you that there is a sullenness of expression generally noticeable? Not that it is confined to facial expression merely; any of these Illingford chaps would give you a highly uncivil answer for two pins.'

'And you may live years in Australia, never being otherwise treated than with the highest courtesy. You couldn't *make* a fellow say a rude thing to a gentleman there if you paid him for it. But there goes the saddling-bell, by Jove! are you quite ready?'

Brandon and M'Callum came up at that minute and we walked into the saddling-paddock together. There stood the array of my antagonists, twenty-four in all variety of form and colour, mostly combining speed with a considerable proportion of that power and 'scope' necessary to the steeds that have to cross three miles and a half of such country with welter weights up.

We found Jim standing calmly, yet withal watch-

fully, while the old horse was pulling his hat about and mumbling his person generally, apparently in a very cool and unexcited frame of mind.

As the sheet was removed, and the middle-sized, well-fitting, but not too light saddle was lifted on to his shapely back, a buzz of admiration sounded from the bystanders.

'No mistake about his form,' said Herbert Ainslie; 'if my horse had been as fit last year I should have won the Lincoln Spring instead of finishing second. I never thought his legs could have come out so fine. Plenty of hand-rubbing, eh, Jim?'

'His legs are right, sir,' said Jim, with an air of grave conviction, 'and every mortal thing about him, and will keep so till the day after to-morrow; I wouldn't guarantee him an hour longer. But his heart, sir, is the best of all, and that's the main thing after all in a steeplechase, horse or man.'

'Quite right there, Whitby! It's a pity they haven't any of the big three-railed doubles here, like a Flemington lane; how he used to sail over them with George Wharton!'

'You may say that, sir; but this is a heavy course, and some of the water pretty big. They say that French horse is a regular flier.'

'By the bye, Boldrewood,' said Brandon, 'look out for Rochelle; they say he's meant, and that the other good ones that Major Wardsley has in the stable will only make the running for him.'

'They're all good enough to win,' said Jack M'Callum; 'a man doesn't often hear of four such horses as Rochelle, Grosvenor, Swordfish, and Fortress in one stable. If one can't "camp" old Emerald, another may.'

'Back the field then,' said I, 'and then some of us *will* win, if the others lose.'

'Emerald *can't* lose,' said Strongbowe, who, with a large betting-book and an alarming overcoat, had just joined us. 'I saw him run four miles in Melbourne over five-foot fences, and a creek that goes into the Saltwater River. He carried thirteen stone, and did it in eleven minutes fourteen seconds by my watch, without touching a rail. I landed three thousand on it. I took a thousand to three hundred with Sir Charles Hotham. You remember, Boldrewood, don't you?'

'I think I was in Tasmania and missed that meeting, Strongbowe,' I answered apologetically. 'I hope he may go as well to-day, though he won't have George Wharton on his back.'

'No, that's true—fine fellow, George; best horseman south of the line; best horseman in the world in my opinion. Remember that story of him and me and the bishop?'

'No,' said I, slightly surprised, and feeling whether I had got the exact link in the curb-chain, 'can't say I do.'

'Well, his Lordship and I and George were having a yarn on the Melbourne course one day—Champion race, I think—good fellow the bishop, no pride and knows a good horse—when George said suddenly, "My brother got hurt in Westmeath the other day, broke his leg."

'"Indeed," says the bishop, "indeed, Mr. Wharton; you had a letter by last mail, I presume?"

'"Oh no," says George carelessly, "nothing of that kind—saw it in *Bell's Life*."'

'Deuced good,' said I, 'just like Wharton. Here we go! Give me a leg up, Aymer; steady, old man!'

Out went the long procession, satin-skinned, silk-jacketed, bold hearts beating alike with excitement

under the ribs of man and horse—all eager for the dangerous game—all ignorant of the proportion of evil certain to befall the gay *cortège.*

I had a half-superstitious fancy for leaving the weighing-yard *last*, and I indulged it upon this occasion.

'All right, sir,' said Jim, '*he's* not in a hurry now; this ain't his end to operate in. Mr. Lindsay had a fancy for going out last always, and I saw him win three steeplechases at one meeting. Ride him steady to the end, sir—that's my tip. He was always a dreadful horse on the post—and look out for that bloomin' Frenchman. I don't like him, or his jock—they're a deal too smart to be pleasant, and bein' a six-year-old he's got the pull in weight. Enniskillen's an old tiger, but he hasn't the pace. The mare will never stay, and Swordfish is too fond of falling. Here's luck, sir!'

Thanking my earnest well-wisher for his advice, which squared with my own ideas, I followed the penultimate pair into the course, and there performed a reasonable 'pipe-opener' solo, when my gallant grey shook off his quiet bearing, and spun past the stand in such form as raised the hopes of his backers, and caused his opponents to wonder whether they had not been too easy about the odds.

'Safe as if he was boiled,' said a plethoric velvet-coated bookmaker; 'how can any 'oss be expected to win a big thing like this 'ere that's been hacked all over the world, and ain't thoroughbred nor nothin'?'

'You never can tell,' remarked a hawk-nosed brother of the craft; 'some of us was took in with that French 'oss for the Derby; a good un's a good un, if he come from Newfoundland.'

As Emerald sped down the straight running in front

of the stand and the judge's chair, as I marked the sea of eager faces turned with deep interest upon us, as I felt the free elastic stride of a good horse in perfect condition, as I noted in the stand the little group so strongly interested, I felt that thrill of exaltation which from all time has made deeds of daring, in the face of a multitude, so choice a mode of possible ending. What to me was the risk of the rough casualties of a steeplechase such as this? I felt as if only a miracle could harm me or my horse, as if all the world of fame and glory lay in front of the starter's flag, and I recked lightly of the cool veterans and wary professionals that made up the lists of my opponents that day.

Mr. M'George has not any unreasonable amount of trouble with us. In three miles and a half, including the usual variety of falls and fencing, a few yards of advantage in the start are truly immaterial. So he gets us into something distantly resembling a rank, and we are off!

Occasionally one observes in a steeplechase that each man seems disposed to try how much more slowly he can go than any one else, how much more he can save his horse, and with what discretion he can transact his leaps, trusting to warm up at the finish, and to win in that dignified and satisfactory manner with which readers of sporting novels are familiar.

Whatever may be considered sound practice in the works of lady novelists and amateur sportsmen, it is evident from the first that the pace is to be a 'cracker' all through, and that our contest promises to partake of the eager rushing of a big field of two-year-olds, combined with the risks of a hurdle-race, and the accidents of fair hunting country thrown in.

Swordfish and Fortress jump off with the lead, as if

the fleeting triumph of the T.Y.C. was the uppermost consideration. Rochelle, Enniskillen, and La Bayadère are lying well up, going manifestly within themselves. The great array of the less ambitious, or less admired, the usual rank and file, are waiting for a chance. The first few fences are nothing. Each horse slips over without apparent exertion. The water-jump, as usual, exercises a certain power of selection. Down goes Harry Dacre, and an unyielding hedge-binder accounts for two others of our contingent. I have as yet no misgivings. I ride not very far from Rochelle, who strikes me as being as fit as my own horse, bigger, probably faster, and with a horseman on his back in the well-known Charlie Thorncroft, who is as unlikely to throw away a point in the game as any man in the kingdom. Ahead of us both, and going like birds, were Swordfish and Fortress, the latter with all the strength of her 'stout' race, and the former as if he intended to win by a couple of fields and three fences at least.

However, I was not so new to the game as not to know that about the end of the second mile a different set of tactics would receive consideration. By that time Rochelle and a chosen few, among whom I included myself, would find the leaders 'coming back to us,' the faint hopes of the second division would then be dashed ruthlessly to the ground, and a grand set-to would take place between Fortress, Rochelle, Swordfish, La Bayadère, Vanguard, Emerald, and some outsider not unlikely to show up at the finish, but whose 'name, weight, and colour of the rider' I was unable as yet to designate.

Meantime, in so large a field, the fortune of war, chiefly unfavourable, commences to be stated. Chatsworth breaks down after a splendid extension over the

brook. Ben Bolt, true to his name and nature, overpowers his jockey, when between Pacha and You're-another, goes too fast at a double, and displays his military rider stretched on the sward in a complicated fall, the least result of which is a broken collar-bone. Ottoman refuses a brook, and Berengaria, over-jumping herself, rolls over, gets away, and loses more ground than she could recover in a week. Nothing has tended as yet to show that Emerald will not last as he is to the end. He has touched nothing; gone near nothing. He is a little eager, and pulls occasionally but never rushes. He is as good at water as Rochelle, and clears his rails as cleverly as Enniskillen, who has the cat-like activity of the Irish hunter. I begin to be anxious for the last mile, when we shall close up ranks for business, and for the last half-mile, when 'the call' will be made.

CHAPTER XLII

AND now, *per varios casus et tot discrimine rerum*—moving accidents by flood and field—which may, freely translated, stand for falls at brook and rail, baulks and boltings, loss of pace, loss of wind, and comings to grief in all the divers shades of defeat common to horse and rider in the mimic battle called a steeplechase, we have reached the momentous half-mile from home. The concluding struggle commences. Five horses, and five only, are 'there or thereabouts,' and as I set Emerald going, with an abandonment of all reserve, my heart swells with a foretaste of victory, as the old horse throws up his head and commences to

snort—an ancient signal of his in the period of second wind.

He challenges Rochelle; both are to all appearance as full of running as when we started. We have a last water-jump with a made fence on the landing side, a big double, and two flights of rails—the latter unusually high and stiff for English fencing—and—the run in. We face the water side by side, Rochelle, I, and La Bayadère, the mare struggling gamely, but nearly told out, Swordfish and Fortress close behind. We seem to rise at the same moment, and Emerald sails across, clearing the made fence with a foot to spare, and dropping into the next field as lightly as the uncarted deer when he pops over the park paling.

As far and fast went Rochelle, but did not get so quickly away as Emerald, whose speciality it was to lose less time at his jumps than any quadruped, not being a doe kangaroo going downhill, that ever was seen. La Bayadère touches and barely escapes a fall, but the Captain has her up and with us again, albeit going a little wild, before we can remark upon it. Close behind, like sleuth-hounds watching for the smallest mischance, come Swordfish and Fortress. It may be fancy, but do they slightly gain upon us? The steeds of the second brigade are having a very nice race among themselves, but unless aided by his patron saint in person, as were the Castilians in the last battle with the Moor, the chance of every rider therein is lost irrevocably. In the same order we reach the double; Captain Enderby, trusting in the proverbial lissomness of the Punchestown winner, races at the ugly jump as if he intended to fly the whole arrangement. He is a long way from thinking of so mad an attempt, but he knows his only chance is to force the pace at this leap, and if possible to dispose of me or Rochelle

thereat. We cannot afford to give a yard, and at forty miles an hour—more or less—we face the worst leap of the day. I have Emerald pretty well in hand, and as he clears the first rail, and I swing him a little sideways to 'buck' the second, as many a time he has done before, La Bayadère, swerving from the whip, 'cannons' full against us, with a shock that sends her reeling to her knees, and all but turns over Emerald in the critical moment when he is rising to his leap. I feel him stagger—but with that wonderful power of recovery that belongs so peculiarly to the Arab blood when at speed, he springs upward and forward with a mighty stag-like bound. Had the collision but occurred a second sooner, it would have saved us. But the accursed chance had happened with a fatal precision as if expressly contrived for our downfall, and of malice prepense. I feel the gallant horse strike the unyielding oak-rail. He rolls over. I am conscious for one moment of a crushing weight across my chest. I feel my right arm snap like a reed—a moment of darkening eyes and bursting heart, and—we are standing side by side. Emerald trembling all over, and the blood streaming from a gash above the knee where the stripped skin hangs down in an ugly flap. It is not the first fall of the kind I have had, by many a one, and mechanically grasping the pommel with my bridle-hand, I throw myself across the saddle, and we are off at speed before I quite regain seat and stirrups. The rush of the chill breeze brings back the pulses to my heart and clears the mist from my brain. I had seen a race won on the post ere this after as bad a fall, and what horse and man can do, in utter desperation to cheat evil fortune, shall be done to-day. Rousing with reckless heel my maddened animal, I race desperately for the lead. I pass Swordfish and

Fortress, Emerald snorting like his old self, and going like smoke. He hardly seems to touch the ground with his swift elastic stride, and is apparently as fit as ever for the last struggle, which, whether over the flat or across the 'sticks,' had always been his forte. He flies the last fence but one like a sheep-hurdle, and racing for life or death, with the abandon of the deer in Indian forests, who sees behind him the beauteous form and cruel eyes of the cheetah, we overhaul Rochelle at the last leap. He is sailing away with an easy lead, and if so old a practitioner *could* believe the race to be his before he had gone to scale, the fancy of jingling the identical 'eight hundred sovereigns added' might have been uppermost in his cool brain. But if he had one fleeting glimpse of that coveted 'pot,' and the modest investment at nine to one on which he stood to win, before the favourite advanced to five, he relinquishes such day-dreams promptly.

He has heard our rush, and without turning his head, sends Rochelle at his last fence. It is high and stiff, and confiding in his experience of nags in difficulties, he makes little doubt but that a beaten horse ridden wildly is more likely to fall again than to 'come' cleverly—certain to be passed, hands down, in the straight running by the patiently nursed Rochelle, whom he proposes to 'get at' as soon as he lands from his jump. He would have been right in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred; but as Emerald rushes with his mouth open, so to speak, at his fence, I feel every muscle of his splendid frame at highest tension. It will not matter where he takes off. In his present state of excitement, with untouched wind, and the 'victory or Westminster Abbey' determination, of which horses really seem to be capable in supreme

moments, he could 'jump a town.' Both horses are again in the air together, but Emerald takes a frantic fly, like the historical one of Chandler, and is off and away like a hare with the greyhound's muzzle at her flank. I hear the hoarse roar of the multitude as we stretch out desperately up 'the straight.' Cries of 'Rochelle—Emerald!' 'The Frenchman has it!' 'No, by Jove!' smote dully upon senses which partly from the exquisite pain of the broken bone, partly from the crushing effects of the fall, were fast leaving me. In spite of utmost effort, a mist now black, now redly vaporous, seems deepening over my eyes. Still can I feel the tireless bound and lengthened stride of the peerless steed, as with mechanical instinct I hold his head with unslackened grip. Some things are in my favour, though prevented from using the jockey's aid of hand and heel, so vitally necessary in the finish of a close-run race. But Emerald had always been a peculiar horse. Unexcited and what the populace call 'dozey' at the start, he seemed to gather a species of cumulative ardour as the chase wore on. This has always been held to be a peculiarity of that royal blood from which he drew a large proportion of his lineage. No vulgar impatience, no paltry petulance impairs the manner of the calm aristocrat of the desert. His the cool courage that looks unmoved upon the lion and the elephant, that bears his rider within spear-length of the grim fangs of the tiger; and when mile after mile of waterless waste must be passed at speed, the foe overtaken, the pursuer eluded—when the water is afar, and the barley bag empty, then does the desert-born *commence* to exhibit the fire and fleetness for which his fathers were prized by Ishmaelite sheikhs, to whom was as yet unknown the dread name of Mahomet.

So with Emerald, the finish had always been his *tour de force*, and the stage at which his backers hoped for victory, for they knew by experience that if it was in him, he would 'come with a rush,' and he had never yet (as Jim said) 'been near enough for a struggle at the post, that he wasn't near enough to win.' He was capable in the very last few strides of the most tremendous exertion, and more than once it had been prophesied that some day he would drop dead at the post, after making one of these miraculous efforts.

'Wonderful wind he must have, surely,' had Jim remarked, commenting upon these victories. 'I saw him lick the crack of the Western district, a great Flying Dutchman horse as could jump a stockyard, and do three miles in mighty good time, and big enough to plough with. The weights were heavy, twelve stone ten pound, I think, and the poor old horse was thrown out by some duffer that fell in front of him. But you should have seen him sail over the six last fences, all stiff and high too, as if they were sheep-hurdles. Won by a head, and a short one too. He don't suffer from palpitation of the heart, anyhow.'

This somewhat realistic description of an authentic feat had amused us a few weeks before the race one afternoon at the customary lounge over the stables; but it was a perfectly true description of his 'manner and custom' where winning was possible.

Remembering this trait, and trusting to the transformation which from these and the like chronicles my horse was capable of in the last few strides, I nerved myself, in despite of a more loudly throbbing brain, and the spasmodic agony of the fractured bone, for the fast-coming goal. I feel rather than see the long stride of Rochelle, a grand stayer with the advantage of the best

gentleman-rider in England on his back. For a moment I have a mad desire to hurl myself off and so end the awful torture, the unendurable endless suspense, as it seems to me. Lifting my head I can see the white face and widely-opened eyes of Gwen gazing stonily at my altered appearance. I mark the tall form and gallant bearing of Aymer Brandon, as he shouts 'Emerald!' in a voice that dominates the surge-like roar of the excited multitude. I feel new life for a moment, and as I grasp the never-slackened rein, and grip with nervous knee the body of my horse, I feel once more that strange electrical sympathy, that blending of horse and rider, that none know that have not fought out the desperate rally of a hard-won race.

For it was *won!* I remembered but little after the sight of Gwen's face. I thought I recollected finding myself in the centre of a crowd, maddened and savagely moved as it seemed to me. My horse was being led, while swaying helplessly in the saddle I leaned against a tall form, whose vast strength and stern command parted the crowd like a group of schoolboys, as we entered the weighing-yard.

Dimly I gazed upon the kind face of Sir Geoffrey Hillesden, who had to repeat his formal order to dismount, ere I comprehended it. I must have reeled over to the scales. Was that Jack M'Callum that propped me up? How can I tell? My saddle is placed with me as I half sit, half lie upon the scale.

'Weight, old man!' shouts Brandon, as he puts his arm round my neck and lifts me to my feet with the strength of a giant and the tenderness of a woman. But I cannot be sure whether or no we are going to the Grand Stand or to Boldrewood, because—I fainted!

CHAPTER XLIII

I HEARD afterwards that much excitement arose, all unwitnessed by me, at that particular conjuncture. The Ring had laid against the 'colonial horse' pretty extensively in the early part of the betting. Some of them had managed to lay off, but the greater proportion had to stand the shot, and when Emerald was adjudged to have won by 'a short head' the losses, and consequently the wrath, consternation, and uproar, were unprecedented. Had I fallen or been compelled to dismount before going to scale, a protest might have been lodged, and the material for an extensive wrangle afforded. Accusations would have been forthcoming; that I had 'come in short,' that 'dead weight' had been handed to me, and so on. A dozen rascalities *possible* in turf matters would have been reproduced for my benefit with the recklessness of losing gamblers. But no such evasion was possible while the strong, sure hand of Aymer Brandon was on my bridle-rein, while his calm, scornful eye rested on the excited *canaille*, while before his determined aspect the yelling throng fell back, like waves that beat all vainly upon the frowning headland.

Near enough for action, in a compact body, undemonstrative but decided as to their programme, had there been an overplus of crowd and an insufficiency of police, stood the Australian contingent.

'Well done, old New South Wales!' said Herbert Ainslie; 'I was afraid that confounded mare had *knocked* the wind out of Emerald, or broken Rolf's

leg (I saw he was broken somewhere, from the bother he had in mounting). Thought my long shot was gone the way of all virtuous wagers; but the old horse, they say, never collared the favourite between the last leap and the post that he didn't win. Awful smash too. But *he* can fight on three legs or two like the traditional bull-dog.'

'I bet on the *man*,' said Strongbowe; 'his father's the oldest friend I have in the world. Thinks no end of me. "Strongbowe," said he, "dashed if I'd let my boy go home to the—well, bloomin' country" (awful old fellow to swear, Eric Boldrewood), "if I didn't know *you* were there. I know you'll keep an eye on him, and you can put him right, from the cottage to the palace."

'"Right you are," says I, "Boldey, old man; there are not many establishments in Britain, I may say in Europe, between those limits where Arthur Strongbowe isn't a welcome guest."

'"If Louis Napoleon had only taken my advice, Strongbowe," said he; "you remember what you told me when we lodged in Surrey Street, Strand, together? *You* never approved of the *coup d'état*," but here that confounded Fleury came in. He always hated me, and our interesting yarn was stopped.'

'Why the deuce didn't you go into the Imperial service?' asked Herbert Ainslie most seriously; 'you might as well have been Duke of Lepanto, or Marshal Longjumeau, when titles of that degree were going so plentifully. King of Spain perhaps! A *château en Espagne* would have been quite in your line.'

'My dear boy,' quoth the good-natured, all-unconscious Strongbowe, 'do you think I would give up the position of an English country gentleman for any of their rubbishy foreign rank? No! plain John Bull,

who has seen a little of the world, is quite good enough for me as long as I can hold the old double-barrel straight, and ride with a decent pack of fox-hounds. But I was going to tell you I come pretty well out of this.'

'How much, our trusty and well-beloved Archer?' inquired Ainslie. 'Now, remember, you're not talking to "new chums."'

'Honour bright; don't you remember how the Melbourne Club fellows used to say, "If Strongbowe states it, there's no more to be said about the matter —he's such a scrupulously particular fellow"? Well, I haven't landed a penny more than ten thousand five hundred. Fact! as we stand here. But, bless you, *I knew* the horse must win. Astonishing talent for timber. Knew him from a colt. Clermont of Ellangowan, Port Western, bred him; and what do you think Bob Clermont used to do after dinner, while he was breaking him in?'

'Can't say really—give him a bottle of claret?'

'He and Dick Weatherston (he was staying with him) used to put lanterns on adjoining posts of a three-rail fence, five feet high, with iron bark rails, and jump Emerald and Avonsides back and forward after *ten at night.* What do you think of that?'

'That they were both mad, and it's a miracle that Emerald survived to break his leg to-day, Boldrewood's arm, and cause the pot to boil over for the metallicians —confound them!'

'Not a bit of it, only fair schooling. I knew the breed. Old Sheikh Abdallah said to me at Calcutta: "Sahib, you great Feringhee lord; Allah give you the true knowledge of horses" (he believed in me, did old Abdy); "but if you ever see son or grandson of the great Seglāwee steed that go to Australia in my youth

(may their beards be defiled that sold him!), you back him in all great race; you sell shirt, Sahib; you steal diamond from your best friend—but you *back him.*"'

'"Wallah! Aneezah hokeybadur, muezzin mafeesh!" answered I, quite staggered by his earnestness. We parted. I never saw him again; but I acted upon his advice to-day, my boy. There's no indecision about Arthur Strongbowe. And you see the result—ten thousand five hundred. Nearly as good a day as Punchestown.'

. . . . . .

Let not the much-enduring reader imagine that he is about to be conducted through the graduated stages of an illness, commencing with delirium and ending with the regulation recovery, common to heroes of romance, tended by fair hands, and gazed on by loving eyes. I was not fatally injured. 'The reverse if anything,' as the irascible old gentleman avouched from the bottom of the ditch, when asked if he had sustained damage. Many a fall, many a 'smash' had fallen to my share in old days, in variety of relation to every species of horseflesh. I was rather annoyed, indeed, at my collapse, which was not in my opinion justified by the injury sustained, until it was discovered by the surgeon, sent in hot haste by my kind old uncle, that I had cracked a couple of ribs as well as my arm, the inward grating of which fractured bones had arrested temporarily the wheels of the clock.

I was well enough, however, in a couple of days to set out for the Chase in the family drag, accompanied, to my great joy, by Brandon and Jack M'Callum, for my uncle, having taken a violent fancy to them, insisted upon bearing them back with him.

'We must have Bevis of Hampton,' the old man said. 'I should never forgive myself if I omitted a

chance of knowing him, now he has come to life, though how he made his way to Australia I can't think. Whether or no, he and Mr. M'Callum are two of the finest men I ever saw. I am like bluff King Hal, I like to look on a man. They are great admirers of you, Rolf, too, and that is not the smallest recommendation in our eyes—eh, Gwen?'

'I saw Mr. Brandon lift you up,' said Gwen, 'when you fell back, looking so white and terribly like death; and if he had been your brother, or even me or Githa, he could not have been more tender. I was nearly rushing through the crowd myself, I can tell you.'

'I have no doubt you were,' said Harold; 'a nice figure you would have looked among all those roughs, and a cluster of ring-men not too good-tempered at losing their money.'

'Well, why should I not?' quoth Gwen gallantly, sticking by her colours. 'Rolf is our cousin, and he was dying. I am sure he looked like it. Who am I, that I should have been ashamed of raising his head and aiding in recovery?'

How handsome she looked standing there, with her head slightly thrown back, her beautifully proportioned figure in an unstudied attitude, gracefully expressive of courage, even defiance, with her quivering lip and clear honest eyes, bright with the irradiation of a soul that soared above all paltry pettinesses of society. I thought that I noticed the smouldering fire in Aymer Brandon's eye glow, as his steady gaze fell upon the high-souled maiden, so lofty of spirit, so tender of heart. Oh, Gwen, dear old Gwen! 'tender and true,' when vexed with uncongenial society, or cursed with the companionship of the unæsthetic and the unsympathising, the barrenness of whose minds was only proportioned to the aggressive irritation of their conversation, how

often have I longed for thy low-toned rippling talk, thy true, though chastened humour, thy fearless championing of all things good! Thou, with the women like unto thee, art truly the salt of the earth, redeeming the wickedness of the nations from the day of wrath; building up the sorely assailed faith in one's kind, which yet lingers in the heart of manhood; earning the reverence of the good, the devotion of the young, the respect of the indifferent and the evil.

Fate might have severed us—years passed without the vision of the well-remembered presence. But whenever a chance word or stray panegyric led on to the ideal of the 'perfect woman nobly planned,' there never failed to arise before me the form of Gwendoline Boldrewood.

CHAPTER XLIV

ALTHOUGH on a fair way to recovery, surrounded by relatives and friends of sympathetic tendencies, I was not quite up to starting for Australia. So I quieted conscience by writing a cautiously worded epistle to that far land, excusing myself on the plea of circumstances unforeseen from starting by the March overland mail, but vowing to be on the sea next month. 'If the season is as dry as they make out,' I told myself. Here I looked out of the library window, and wondered what they would give for the drizzling, misty thaw with which all nature seemed saturated beyond hope of future desiccation.

'If it is so *very* dry,' I resumed, 'a month either way won't make much difference. Indeed, none at

all.' By Jove! I never thought I was of so logical a turn of mind. 'Then I shall have time to buy these Bates's shorthorns, some of the old Grasmere and Lady Vane strain that my father was so fond of. He always declares that if he had kept the "tribe" together, they would have been as valuable as those American Dukes and Duchesses of Thorndale. Then the horses; I shall transport the Pirate, I think. Harold shall have Wanderer as a souvenir, and Emerald shall be dear Gwen's to love and to cherish. He shall carry no one else till the day of his death. Jim shall have a fortnight's leave of absence to go back to Galway and get married (U—urgh! hang that arm of mine, is it never going to knit?), and things in general will be all arranged in a complete and satisfactory manner.'

Thus I mused and moralised in one of the infrequent intervals when I was left to myself for a season. Happy is the invalid who is never solitary and *gêné*, even amid the most tender nursing. Helpless, non-progressive, non-sufficing for his own poor needs and pleasures, what a dreary desert has that man or woman reached who, doomed to chronic helplessness, endures a solitary existence as only less terrible than—death!

I thankfully acknowledge that I was not entirely bereft of creature comforts. I could read and smoke, and was even permitted to drink with discretion. Then our evenings, with the added distraction occasioned by the presence of Brandon, M'Callum, and Leslie, with neighbouring damsels invited to equalise matters, were joyous exceedingly.

The Squire was delighted with the feats of skill and strength performed by *les trois mousquetaires*, as he was pleased to call them. There was a frolic freshness about Leslie and M'Callum which the old man heartily enjoyed; their encounters also with Harold, the Major,

and the county notables in shooting and athletics were witnessed by him with the deepest interest.

'Really,' said he, 'I think we must all emigrate, in order to keep up the mental and bodily standard, preserve the precious type of the Anglo-Saxon, and so on. Our people emigrated to come here, and have been pretty comfortable for a thousand years or so. But I think it is time we made another move—eh, Gwen? What does Harold say?'

'*He* says like Mr. Codlin,' said Harold, '"that he'll see his partner boiled alive" before he adopts any scheme of migration; but I don't doubt it's decent enough quarters for a time—for a time. I have a prejudice in favour of Pall Mall and the Junior United, and even for this old rookery, strange as it may seem.'

'I quite agree with you, Harold,' said I; 'in fact, I was just fancying to-day that I was becoming unpatriotically fond of Hampshire myself. I feel like Jack before the mast—sure to welcome the first sight of blue water, but none the less likely to go on board at the last minute much disguised in liquor, with the added responsibility of having caused the second mate to swear for an hour and a quarter without cessation.'

'Suppose we all go out next mail,' suggested Brandon; 'Leslie and M'Callum *ought* to go back, for the same reason as Rolf here, if they have any feelings of propriety. I thought of St. Petersburg or Khiva for a little variety; but really now, one place to me is just the same as another, and I'll make one for Sydney with pleasure. I know the Squire is mad to go. He and I are going to Queensland together to buy a cattle station, that's settled. Miss Boldrewood, we only want your consent and company, and we shall be a *partie carré*.'

'I'm passionately fond of travel,' that young lady replied; 'but I'm sick of the Rhine steamers and the

guide-book, mill-horse, continental round. I'm sure Rolf's arm will get broken again if I'm not there to look after him; but I'm afraid,' she added demurely, 'that obstacles might arise at the last moment. Still, I'll give the subject my best consideration, as dear old Lord Palmerston said down here the other day when they wanted him to promise something or other.'

'It always beats me,' said Harold, 'what you fellows do out there half your time. I take it you are not virtuously tending your sheep and cattle, personally and unremittingly always. There is a little hunting, I hear, not much shooting, fishing can't exist without trout and salmon. When you get your "leave," what the deuce do you go in for?'

'Well,' said M'Callum, 'we have this advantage, that even in our daily work we have the chance of adventures and striking variations which you can't get at home. We must put them against the trout and salmon, which I admit *are* serious considerations.'

'Adventures!' cried out Githa with unusual earnestness. 'Oh, Gwen! think of that. Let us have an evening's story-telling, if everybody will join in. It will be so much nicer than music or whist.'

'Why, you're a regular Scheherazade,' said Gwen, brightening up at the idea; 'only you are going to petition for tales instead of telling them. Guy must tell a story too, or it won't be fair. What do you say, Mr. Brandon?'

'Story! Heaven bless you, I have none to tell, ma'am!' answered that calm, though scarcely veracious colonist.

'Oh, come, Aymer! that's all humbug,' promptly returned Jack M'Callum. 'Don't believe him, Miss Boldrewood; he has a whole budget of feats of arms. If he is so awfully modest, I shall have to tell one for

him, and he must take his chance of my style. You might give us that bushranger story. I think I must furbish up my kinsman Hector's night attack by O'Rourke's gang. There's a heroine in that story, Miss Boldrewood.'

'Oh, thanks, Mr. M'Callum; you can't think how I long for something different from our everyday life. Mr. Brandon, don't you think'—pleadingly—'you might condescend to turn *raconteur* for the evening? Just to please *me*, do. Harold will follow suit, perhaps. Guy we can compel, you know!'

'*Must* one blow one's own trumpet, Miss Boldrewood?' asked Brandon. 'I'll leave the whole responsibility to you. I know Jack is capable of the most unprincipled exaggeration, and for fear of letting loose his talent for fiction, I really feel compelled to turn *improvisatore* in self-defence.'

'*Che sara sara*,' said Harold; 'I had no idea that Githa could be so ingeniously mischievous. Guy, if I were you, I should stop this tendency in time. If *you* are forced into narratives of your early life, it may lead to unforeseen results.'

'I think I shall write "Confessions of a Captain"—that sounds well, doesn't it?—sign before a magistrate, hand it over to her neatly bound, and close the subject for ever. But who is to begin?'

'I propose that we draw lots,' said Harold; 'that will save our blushes. Indians are proverbially modest, as also, I think I have heard, are colonists.'

'Perfectly charming,' assented Gwen; 'let us all sit round the fire. Now then, Mr. Brandon, you are actually the victim. "Gentlemen of the Guard, fire first." There's no escape.'

'Well,' answered the loser, drawing a comfortable lounge nearer to Gwen, 'I shall the sooner be in the

proud position of critic. So here goes. Jack, I'll not die unavenged, so beware! If *ever* I save you from drowning again, may I—— But here goes.

'"Once upon a time"—isn't that the time-honoured commencement?—somewhere about the end of 185–, I was visiting a new station, situated in the desert, or, as Australians describe such regions, the Never Never country. It was a tract of enormous plains, indifferently watered, and about a thousand miles from everywhere. Matters are apt to border on the lawless in such localities, the peace-officers numbering about two to a hundred miles square, and depending principally upon moral force, a quality conspicuous by its absence. It was occasionally used as the happy hunting-ground of the enterprising bushranger. So, whenever we heard of a solitary robber or a gang being "out," we thought his appearance within our orbit was a certainty as absolute as the transit of Venus.

'One fine day—very fine, I may say—there had been no rain for about six months, and the thermometer in the verandah stood at 110—I had some business occasion to visit a next-door neighbour. He lived only thirty-six miles off. So with Harry Bracy, an old friend, I drove over in a light American trap, and reached the station about lunch time.

'We could see the place about five miles off, but as we came within the distance of discriminating objects, Bracy said—

'"What are they all sitting on the stockyard rails for?"

'"Drafting cattle, or going to kill a bullock, or the black boys have run in a wild horse," I answered indolently; "anything stands for an excitement in this wilderness of Sin, or Paroo. Fancy forty years of life here!"

'"Fine country all the same when they get rain," answered Bracy, who, as a pioneer of this choice region, felt hurt at my remarks. "I can't see anything in the yard, though. Those fellows look just like crows, don't they?"

'"Here comes one of them," said I, drawing up to a walk at the foot of the sand-ridge on which the station stood; "he'll tell us all about it."

'As I spoke a man sauntered down on foot towards us, dressed much like other people. He walked up to the shoulder of the near-side horse, and suddenly producing a revolver pointed it at a vital portion of my frame, and in a voice of melodramatic hoarseness commanded us to get out.

'"Bonthron, by Jove!" said Harry.

'"I'm Bonthron, right enough," said the ruffian. "I've just shot one man, and I'll d—d soon shoot another if you ain't down afore I count five. D'ye hear what I say?" roared he.

'"I hear you," said I, jumping down; "we are a little astonished, that's all." Here I unharnessed the horses and let them go, without asking permission, feeling sure that they would be home before sundown.

'I began to feel savage, firstly in that I had left my revolver at home, which I mostly carried, and secondly that I had been ordered about by this brute. Harry and I were able to catch one another's eyes for half a second. Each knew he could depend on the other for instant and effective aid. He was active, powerful, and brave as a lion. Had volunteered once before to run down a far more dangerous ruffian than this one. Both intended to make a rush if we saw a chance, and our friend kindly gave us one. He looked for one instant away from us and towards the still interested spectators on the stockyard. *Now* we knew the meaning of their

continuously elevated station. As he turned his head I sprang forward, and catching the robber's right wrist with my left hand, lifted him up with the other and brought him with a bang against the fore-wheel, which must have inconvenienced him. Bracy had him by the other arm with instantaneous precision, so that our captor was captured in turn. We secured the lethal weapon and brought our captive to the house, where, having chained him to one of the posts of the verandah, we asked our friends on the stockyard whether they had any conscientious objections to come down. We found that Bonthron had intimated generally, but with firmness, that if any man dared to come down from the said perch, he would blow the roof of that person's skull off.

CHAPTER XLV

'WE accepted cheerfully a glass of whisky and water, our host having produced a bottle of the former restorative, not forgetting to give one to the captive, as probably standing in need of refreshment.

'"How in the world did you come to be so ignominiously enslaved?" I asked. "We saw you all roosting on the stockyard long before we came up. You were not there all night, I suppose?"

'"Nonsense!" answered our host, slightly annoyed. "It was the old story, of course—taken unprepared. He marched in while we were at breakfast—made us walk out singly. He kept too far from any one for a rush."

'"'And none to be the sacrifice would choose,'"

chimed in Bracy. "Well, we're not all so long in the reach as Brandon. What shall we do with him to-night?"

'As he spoke, two horsemen appeared on the outer rim of the sky-line "that brings our friends up from the under-world." These turned out to be troopers of the Queensland police, who had been on the track of Bonthron for a trifle of three hundred miles. To them we cheerfully surrendered our prisoner, and saw him depart on a led horse, handcuffed, and without control of his bridle-reins.'

'What became of him?' asked the Squire. 'I suppose you never encountered him afterwards?'

'No, I did not, *pour raison*. The evidence upon his trial went to show that he had fired three chambers of his revolver into an inn-keeper at Milana, obstinate in parting with his money. The court saw an attempt to murder in cold blood, so they hanged him—which is the end of the third volume!'

'How dreadful!' said Gwen; 'but I suppose he was a very wicked man. How fortunate you were to be so quick, before he had time to fire. I can hardly think how you managed.'

'"How strange it seems that a man should miss, when his life depends on his aim," as poor Lindsay hath it in *Wolf and Hound*,' said M'Callum. 'But Aymer didn't miss his catch, or it would have been all up with him and Bracy. He *is* rather quick, Miss Boldrewood, though you mightn't infer it from his shamefully lazy habits.'

Gwen looked half-inquiringly, half-shyly, at the vast frame and enormous limbs of their guest as she answered, 'I should say there was a good deal of the sleeping lion about Mr. Brandon. Papa, did any one ever attack the Chase in your time? Why, the

smugglers attacked Colonel Mannering's house, you know, in Sir Walter.'

'No, girl, we have had nothing worse than a stray poacher since Old Noll's time; all our fighting is far afield now. Harold and Guy have had their share, but the battle-fields of England are no longer on English soil.'

'And long may it be so,' said I; 'for my part, I feel as if I had just returned from the battle of Dorking, and I dislike the sensation. Githa, move that pillow, there's a dear old lady. Norman, is your sensational fiction ready? Excuse my reminding you.'

'It's no fiction. It's an "ower true tale," more's the pity. Shall I begin, Miss Boldrewood? Now we're off. Let me start with the assertion that Frank Hamilton was one of the finest fellows and most lovable mortals that ever God made. I never knew a man so universally popular. The women loved him for his bright blue eyes, his winning smile, his fair curls—we didn't crop our heads like fellows on the treadmill in those days—and his unfailing high spirits. He had a considerable infusion of dare-devil, too, in his composition, which did not detract from the general effect or from the softness of his manner. For the rest, he was manly, true, unselfish, and brave to the point of extreme rashness. For these qualities his associates—generally the best judges of a man's character—voted him a trump, a good fellow, a very decent chap, and so on—in the affectedly simple phrase with which Englishmen assert the possession by their equals of the noblest attributes of human nature.

'I met him at an important muster on a large station that had just changed hands. It was a fine property, but neglected. The cattle were awfully wild. Therefore we gathered forces, to see what aid we

could render to the buyer, who was an old friend and neighbour.

'Such was the case with the Merangadoo herd—as fierce as the Chillingham one, though more numerous, and we had no end of trouble, fun, and a little danger, in collecting them. But, as we were all young, active, and mad for excitement, all the galloping, an occasional fall, and the narrow escapes in drafting (the ladies won't understand this last expression, I'm afraid), were looked upon as additional advantages and entertainments.

'One day we had secured some outlying cattle, which had not seen a yard for years. We got them in by desperate exertion, Frank Hamilton having worked like half-a-dozen men. Among these was a black bullock, a celebrated "outlaw," who had contracted a habit of breaking away—had not been seen inside an enclosure by the oldest stock-rider. By some fluke he had been entrapped this time. He was in grand condition, and was at once doomed to slaughter. We had drafted (or separated) him into a long narrow yard, up and down which he was raging like a caged lion. While some one went for the rifle, Frank Hamilton with his usual frolic spirits leaned over and tried to hang his cap on one of the enormous horns as he drove past. Leaning far over, by some unimaginable mishap, he, one of the most agile of men, missed his footing and fell into the yard. Before he could spring upwards, the fierce brute wheeled round with the suddenness of a jaguar, and charging like lightning buried one horn in his chest. He withdrew it stained crimson. Frank vaulted over the high rail, but dropped on his knees on the farther side. He smiled sadly as we lifted him to his feet. "This is my last muster at Merangadoo, Norman! Who would have thought it, old fellow?"

'"Don't talk in that way, for God's sake, Frank," said I; "wait till the doctor comes, he'll put you right, I know."

'But my heart misgave me when we laid him on his bed, and I saw how deeply gored was the breast that had never turned from danger, or given back an inch at a friend's side.

'The country doctor came that night. The messenger who brought him had covered sixty miles in seven hours. But who could not have ridden till his best horse dropped to do help or service to Frank Hamilton?

'He lingered for a week. On some days the doctor's report was hopeful, and we chatted and joked after our long day's work at the yards. When the bulletin was less favourable, we sat moodily around the fire, and smoked silently for hours.

'The Sabbath morning broke—one of the loveliest days of that lovely season, the Australian spring. Not a cloud specked the sky; a faint breeze stirred the waving tops of the long grass on the far-stretching, park-like forest, where the enormous eucalypts stood solemnly apart, like the oaks at Lyndhurst. I had been with him all the morning. He looked serenely cheerful, as indeed during intervals of respite from pain he had been from the first day. "So you've finished the muster and branded up, Norman, without my valuable assistance! How strange it seems to think that I shall never back a horse more. So jolly as we were, too, this day week! I know it's near—*very* near—Norman, and yet I can't believe that I'm dying—dying. I should have liked to have seen my mother again.

'"What o'clock is it? Eleven? Why, they must be all going to church at Hampden now. Do you

remember what a party we made, the last time we were there? I wonder what they'll say next week, when they hear there are no more race balls for Frank Hamilton. What a jolly one that last one was! No more! No more! That's the whole story now. I am going to where many a fellow has gone, and yet somehow a man always fancies it may happen to another to die young—not to him. What a lovely day it is! Sure to be a splendid season too. They ought to have a lot of fine cattle to send away from here; and I was going down with the first lot. No more—again! I wrote to my mother, Norman, just a few lines. You see it there. Do you know, I feel sleepy—or dim about the eyes. Good-bye, old fellow—good-bye! Raise my head, Norman." I placed his head on the pillow; his blue eyes closed wearily; one flicker of sudden light passed over his bright face, and he lay in the eternal sleep, with the smile that we knew so well, unchanged, upon the dead beautiful face.

'There was many a wet eye upon Merangadoo. Strong men mourned, well-nigh wept, for was not Frank Hamilton cold in death, the darling of the district, whom all men loved, whom many a woman would have died for? The rude savages at their camp wailed and cut themselves with shells, after the manner of their race. To them "Massa Prank" was as a demigod. Many a muster have I ridden at, before and since, many a hairbreadth escape have I witnessed; but whenever I hear a thoughtless remark made as to the overrated dangers of the bush, the memory comes freshly back of my best-loved friend, and the death hue that I watched stealing over the sunny features of Frank Hamilton.'

No one spoke. Gwen had covered her face. Githa, with her hand clasped in that of her lover's, had turned

half round, so that he alone could watch her overcharged eyes. Leslie rose, and opening a window looked out into the starless night, with a muttered remark upon the stillness of the gloom. I broke silence. My unwelded bones and muscles were shooting, which tended to irritability. 'I thought the M'Callum Mohr was going to give us a siege, or a combat, as performed by a distinguished member of the clan Cawmil. It was the piper, wasn't it, Jack?'

'Just you ask Hector that little question himself the next time you see him,' answered Jack, commencing to scent disrespect to his highest dignity. 'Piper, indeed! Let me tell you—but I forget, you're a sick man now, and, indeed, you are only joking after all.

'Now listen, everybody! we are all sitting here, about this time—that is, Hector and his wife; lamps lit, lady probably working, Hector looking over his sheep accounts, when, "Hector, love!" said the lady, "I heard a footstep in the passage just now. There it is again!"

'Hector was far from unprepared. He knew that Wall's gang of bushrangers—with a price on each man's head—was in the neighbourhood, so he kept a small armoury in efficient condition. That day, strangely enough, he had felt a presentiment, and being a Highlander, Mr. Rolf, he respected a warning. Thus he spent the afternoon in making cartridges. His repeating rifles were handy for action. He took a revolver from the mantelpiece—you often saw such chimney ornaments in those days; I nearly sat upon one on a sofa once, lying perdu under the *Illustrated London News*—and going into the said passage opened the door softly. At the other end stood a strange man, who raised his arm and fired at him point blank, at the same instant that Hector blazed at *him*. I

suppose they were too hurried for accurate practice, as Hector was not hit, and retired on his base of operations, bolting the door behind him. As he re-entered the sitting-room, the windows were shattered by a volley fired from the front of the house. Placing his wife where she was sheltered by an angle of dead wall, Hector betook himself to his breechloader, and returned fire with such briskness that the enemy overestimated the number of the garrison. This much was confessed afterwards. Anyhow, they abstained from storming the defences, and contented themselves with calling upon him to surrender, and threatening all kinds of vengeance if he continued to resist.

'He simply dared them to come on. For a considerable time there was a brisk fusillade on both sides. Then a suspicious lull took place. Hector was naturally uneasy, not knowing what stratagem might be in progress.

'His doubts were set at rest by seeing flames dart up from the stable, which was dangerously close to the rear of the house.

'"The cold-blooded villains!" cried Hector, grinding his teeth. "Hark! that's poor Swagman! By the Lord, I'll have a scalp for this cruelty! My God! must I stay here, while he is being roasted alive?"

'As the terrible sound, half cry, half shriek, which a horse emits in moments of mortal fear or torture, rose on the night air, Hector swore a deep oath that a life should pay the forfeit of this wanton outrage, if he lost his own in the attempt. The vow was kept.'

'And what were his wife's feelings during this terrible ordeal? How did she act through this fearful night?' asked Gwen.

'She bore herself,' answered Jack, 'as history tells

us women have chiefly done in moments of supreme peril—nobly and devotedly. She cheered her husband by her unshaken mien and watchful aid. She crossed the line of fire with a fresh supply of ammunition, narrowly escaping a death-wound from a grazing bullet. She kept watch and ward, and from time to time reported the movements of the attacking party.

'The eventful night wore on. The stable was burned to the ground; the shrieks of the tortured horse had died away. One of the station hands had started some hours since for the nearest police station. The fire from the bushrangers was kept up and returned with unflagging persistency, while under cover of the conflagration the outlaws had taken up a position closer to the front of the building. Again there was a pause. But the inmates redoubled their vigilance. Suddenly my cousin's brave wife exclaimed, "I see a man raising his head and looking in at us from behind the garden paling."

'"He will pay for Swagman," muttered Hector savagely, as he stole along the side of the verandah—heedless for the moment of the risk of being cut off in retreat. A last glare of the burning timber of the stable flickered up, showing with the clearness of daylight the pitiless face of Lynch appear suddenly, as he searched with the roving glance of a Red Indian for a practicable breach. Hector was one of the best shots I had ever seen, and raising his rifle with lightning rapidity, he sent a bullet through his brain.

'Once more there was silence. In half an hour the roll of horse-hoofs at speed gave the welcome signal of the arrival of police troopers. A search was made instantly. The enemy had decamped, but Lynch lay dead amongst the oaten sheaves; and the night attack *upon* Merimbulah was ended.'

'I don't know which to admire most,' said the Squire, 'your cousin's pluck, or the cool heroism of the lady. She deserved the Victoria Cross.'

'So she did!' cried Gwen enthusiastically, 'but being a woman, of course she was overlooked. *We* never get our share of honour or prize-money or anything. But I thought Australia was such a well-governed Arcadian place, Rolf—are these little incidents "all in the day's work," as you and Guy say?'

'Well,' I was driven to confess, 'occasionally accidents *do* occur; though I consider life and property, on the whole, quite as safe there as in any county in England. There happened to be a kind of epidemic of bushranging at the time, but it was stamped out. Every man of the gang concerned in this affair was either hanged or shot before the year ended. There is nothing of the kind now.'

'Oh, of course,' said Gwen archly, 'that's what people say of Ireland; then next week you see in *The Times* that three persons have been shot in one parish.'

CHAPTER XLVI

'THEY ought to make you Lady Lieutenant,' said Harold. 'You would pacificate them in no time—but if we are going to supper, we have time only for a short legend. Rolf is excused, being a wounded knight. *Mine* would take forty-eight hours to narrate. I vote that Guy be compelled to harrow up our feelings. He was at Jhansi, just after that fiend the Maharanee evacuated the place. He must have seen some most choice horrors.'

'Tis now the witching hour of night,' quoth the Major. 'I anticipated this period of the evening, so I picked out a ballad, descriptive of the miserable tragedy of which I was almost an eye-witness. It was written by an artillery fellow with a turn for verse, and as Githa knows it by heart *she* shall repeat it, as a punishment for bringing this avalanche of story-tellers down on innocent people.'

'It is very mean of Guy to evade his responsibility in this way,' said Gwen; 'but if the lines are *very* good we may excuse him. I remember now Githa conning over some mysterious ballad which she would not show me. So now, ladye fair, please to begin.'

Githa, who was not very valiant as a public performer, appeared on the point of declining the recitation, but stealing a look at the Major, whose face expressed admiring expectation, she took heart of grace and commenced the ballad of 'Priez pour elle' in a voice which, tremulous at first, became clear and sweet as she went on—merging her timidity in the mournful interest of the story.

'In the grey tower they stand at bay,
Where the Moslem fought of old,—
True to their race, in that sad day,
Their lives are dearly sold.

They are but three—a woman fair,
A boy of fearless brow,
He, whom she vowed to love, is there—
God help them, then and now!

With fiercer leaguer ne'er did yet
Those rugged walls resound,
As the swarthy yelling masses swayed
The time-worn keep around.

Our death-doomed brothers fired fast,
Our sister loaded well;

With each rifle crack a spirit passed—
By scores the rebels fell.

Their corses choke the narrow way—
Still swarms the demon hive;
Like a tolling bell, her heart *will* say,
"We ne'er go hence alive!"

Unflinching all! the leaden rain
Slacks not a moment's space;
With a crashing bullet through his brain,
The boy drops on his face!

With outstretched arms, with death-clutched hands,
His mother's darling lies,
No more, till rent the grave's dark bands,
To glad her loving eyes.

Gone the last hope!—faint gleam of light!—
Death stares into their eyes,
While shouts and screams of wild delight
From the frenzied crowd arise.

Oh, God of mercy! can it be?
It is a hideous dream—
No! nearer rolls the human sea,
Arms flash and eyeballs gleam.

He pictures her—pale, tender, fair,
To nameless tortures given,
Gore-stained and soiled the bright brown hair—
His very soul is riven.

He lifts the weapon—does he think
Of a happy summer time?
Of the village meadow, river brink,
Of a merry wedding chime?

Dreamed she when uttering the marriage vow
That ever he should stand,
With the pistol muzzle at *her* brow,
The trigger in *his* hand?

They kissed, they clung in a last embrace,
  They prayed a last deep prayer,
Then proudly she raised her tearful face
  And—a corse lay quivering there.

He stooped, his love's soft eyes to close,
  He smoothed the bright brown hair,
Smiled at the rush of baffled foes,
  And—scattered his brains in air!'

'And was it really true, Guy?' asked Gwen, through her tears; 'did such a piteous thing *really* happen? It seems as if one could be wicked enough to doubt of the goodness of God when such evil is permitted, does it not?'

'Too true, indeed, as were scores of other wretched necessities and fiendish cruelties, for which, however, the full tale of vengeance was exacted. We came up that day,' added the Major, 'in time to give decent burial to the ill-fated pair and the gallant boy who died with them. Poor Somers! I knew him well; a better officer never stepped. And dear sweet Mary Somers, the belle of the whole district when she came out but a few short years before. Thank God, that time is over, never to return in India, I hope.'

'*Priez pour elle*,' said Harold; 'peace to their ashes; he did what was right, I believe. Do you know, I should be sorry to obtrude the fact, but it is as nearly as possible supper-time, and if we are to have any more strong emotions, human nature will not support the tissues without adequate nourishment.'

We recovered our spirits somewhat under the enlivening effects of the time-honoured refection, at which the cares of life for the most part steal away, and those more aerial sprites which follow in the train of Mirth and Fancy have their hour of ephemeral gladness. So with us, the tales of daring, doom, and dread notwith-

standing, in listening to which we had whiled away the wintry night. It was among the last of the pleasant unconventional evenings which I could hope to spend at the Chase. My friends and comrades were all under marching orders for foreign lands, or other engagements. The Major's leave was drawing to a close, when Githa's gentle grace and sweet, unselfish ministrations would be withdrawn from her childhood's home. All things seemed to presage separation and change—possibly that severing of kindred, apparently brief but fated to be eternal.

It may be that such a shadowy prescience impelled us to unwonted efforts to throw off depression. Whether or no, each vied with the other in mirthful good-humour and unfettered glee.

The Squire proposed my health, and safe return to my own land, where he doubted not my friends would receive me with a joy commensurate to the regret felt by those I was leaving behind.

'His *own* regret will be of far the most poignant description, Squire,' affirmed Aymer Brandon; 'when he reaches his own delightful but occasionally dry part of the world. The sense of duty is a most noble sentiment; but Rolf is going back, from all I hear, to face a most awful season, and every kind of financial, social, and professional difficulty. My fixed belief is, that he will remember as sadly as his English friends can wish the green fields and pleasant homes of Old England.'

'We all do,' quoth the Major. 'I speak with the fullest knowledge of the feeling in my own case. How I used to hate everything Indian, and do now, for that matter. But business is business; we all seem to have something to do, chiefly unpleasant, before we can come home and settle down to club life and uninterrupted

whist, by which time the digestion is impaired, and the temper not what it used to be.'

'I think you are all talking in a very unfair, mocking way; I am quite ashamed of Guy, and even Mr. Brandon has become infected with the cynicism of the period,' said Gwen, who always took the chivalrous side of argument. 'Rolf, of course, has his duty to do, and must march when the order comes. Do you think that we women want you to stay at home, and leave the burden and heat of the day to others? I think it one of the misfortunes of our sex that we have often to sit and wait and watch, when we would a thousand times rather share the work and even danger.'

'I believe *you* would have gone in for the Joan of Arc business, Gwen,' remarked Harold, 'if you had had anything of a chance. Really, I do think Fate has been most unkind to you and to me, in not arranging that you should have been the heir to the Boldrewood lands, and borne up the banner of the house. What a sweet, contented young woman I should have made! I do so dearly enjoy having nothing to do and nothing to think about. With a few small comforts I could have stayed at home for years, and envied nobody's adventurous glory. I have no doubt that I should have been voted by all the adjacent county dames a most superior young woman.'

'Miss Boldrewood is thrown away in this a—a—magnificent old country,' affirmed Jack M'Callum. 'Why don't you pay us a visit in Australia, where you would have a contingent to expand in, not a little over-peopled, over-Grundied island like this?'

'Don't believe him, Miss Boldrewood,' interrupted Brandon. 'Jack, does it not strike you that you are talking arrant nonsense? All that you have said re-

solves itself into an assertion that Australia is bigger than England, which nobody can deny. For the rest, all the romantic differences of life that you are promising Miss Boldrewood would amount to this—that in the interior probably she would be extremely dull, and feel bored, much as she would feel in Cornwall or Haworth, if we could reproduce the surroundings of Charlotte Brontë's day; while, in any of the cities, there would be little appreciable difference, except in degree, between the social atmosphere and that of ordinary London life.'

'What a misfortune!' persisted Gwen, determined not to give up the idea of heroic colonisation. 'So all the ten thousand miles of sea would go for nothing, and one would be no farther from home than when one started, like the man who travelled all night to reach his own door, having incautiously joined a return train half-way. Still, I can't help thinking there must be just the least difference, though you won't allow it.'

'Really, I hardly see where it lies, and I would tell you if I knew. The interior—"The Bush," as it is generally called—is not like any part of your experience; but even there, a radius of refinement surrounds each homestead possessed by gentlefolk. It is the rule rather than the exception, though we have our Squire Westerns and Sir Pitt Crawleys, Australian society is the facsimile of English society, with the throne and the higher aristocracy left out, comprising people who are well born, poor and proud, *nouveaux riches*, risen and rising, cultured and uncultured, tolerated or the reverse, in much the same proportions and with the same absolute liberty of choice as in England. The chief difference is, that you can't get over to Paris in the afternoon, to Rome and Venice the day after

to-morrow. Short of that, and I grant you it *is* a privation, the differences of life are imaginary.'

'I believe that one praiseworthy colonial habit,' interposed Harold, 'is that of retiring early. It is now, I think, a quarter to one o'clock. Smoking, I am led to believe, is general there; if so, they don't discuss international coincidences at this hour. Gwen, dear, does anything occur to you?'

'Flat candlesticks, I suppose, that being the drift of your argument, you naughty boy. You are the most matter-of-fact creature. Papa has twice as much sentiment, even now. Good-night, Mr. Brandon! Good-night, Mr. Leslie! I am afraid I shall wake up expecting to see the stables on fire, and hear a volley crashing through the hall windows. Come, Githa!'

. . . . . .

The next morning arrived, that inevitable hour of reckoning and audit, which appears so grimly uncompromising after the pleasantest, wickedest, hopefullest eve soever, calling in accents impossible to ignore for compensation, reparation, expiation, what not. Strangely constituted as we are, why does the necessity ever seem most urgent, the reaction more mordant, the, remorse if one has pinked a foe, betrayed a friend, or incurred a debt, more poignant on the *next morning?* Say, philosophic adherent of the molecular theory, why should our atomic entity so obstinately take the form of injured, clamorous conscience so invariably *next morning?* Some day we shall know. In this our little hour we doubt and wonder and endure; or, like those supernal malignities of the earth's fresh youth, 'believe and tremble.'

On this momentous morn, therefore, there was riveting of armour, burnishing of shields, and buckling

on of spurs, with so much of preparation for departure as may correspond in the nineteenth century for the knights who were to fare forth for crusade and tourney. *Les trois mousquetaires* made adieux, and were driven over to the railway station. Jim Whitby departed for Galway and Mary Joyce; and I found myself compelled to make a pilgrimage to the castle of Sir Thomas de Bates, for the final selection of certain shorthorns, partly for the improvement of the Boldrewood herds, but chiefly for the utter confusion, at the next agricultural show, of a rival breeder, who had obstinately contested the palm with us ever since I could remember. These duties over, there was nothing for it but the interview with the agent of the latter-day potentate Company Sahib—even the lordly and ubiquitous P. and O.—and 'my run home' had, like the holidays of other days, reached its extreme limit.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE fateful eve of my departure, destined to be still further protracted, came at length. A song of Gwen's, 'Je pars demain, il faut quitter Marie,' had been ringing in my ears all day, as we wandered about the old paths bidding farewell to the scene of so many pleasant rambles, so many an outpouring of joyous word and unrestrained mirth, of roused emotions and soaring hope, which these leafless woods, then of greenest gladness, bursting bud, and sheltering, sun-flecked canopy, had witnessed. All was passed away. Gone was the summer, fled the days, the dreams departed, and we, sadly lingering, looked into each other's faces and read there

the doom of farewell, perhaps eternal severance—'death of love, hope, friendship, all that is, except mere breath.'

As the necessity for the irrevocable parting became increasingly apparent, my future life seemed overshadowed by a gloom which no star might irradiate.

And yet I doubted not but that with a word I could draw to my heart, as to a resistless magnet, my cousin's steel-true spirit, her pure soul, her tender, untarnished mind fragrant as her favourite flowers. But O wayward heart — O strange, unsolved, unsearchable mystery of the human will, deemed that I loved the best woman I ever saw, ever shall see, as *a sister*—a sister only! Why could it not be otherwise? Why could not I coerce this unreasonable fancy of mine and know myself successful in the great lottery, rich in the possession of an equal-cultured intellect, and a form which enfolded, as the unopened chalice of the lily, the immortal loveliness of pure womanhood. Mockery of the mockeries of fate! The infatuated, resistless thraldom to the demon element in man's nature, while the angelic visitant sadly folds her wings, as the faint melody of seraphic lyres fades like the unearthly harmony of the unseen air-harp.

'The last walk—the *very* last!' said I after a long pause, as we entered the avenue from a winding sidewalk; 'what shall I do without cousin Gwen, the dearest cousin, the truest friend that ever man had?'

'And what shall *I* do—what shall we all do?' said the girl half-mournfully, half-playfully, while a quiver of the lip, and a downward glance of the dark grey eyes, betrayed a feeling deeper than the words. 'I am quite afraid of papa's state of mind. He goes pottering about just as he did before Harold went to India, only that soon wore off. Githa has her packing to do for *their* departure, happy girl! Well, I must fall back

upon Emerald, I suppose, or take to tapestry, whatever that is, or schools or morning services; these appear to be the only distractions we women are permitted. Men certainly have the best of us there.'

'I can't see the best as far as I am concerned,' I groaned out. 'Do you know, Gwen, I feel so wretched, so hopelessly depressed at the idea of parting with—you all, that I could throw myself into the old moat, and end Rolf Boldrewood's perplexities for ever.'

'Dear Rolf!' said she, passing her hand over my forehead, 'you have not recovered from your fall yet. Don't give in. It is not like you. We have all something to bear, and chiefly alone. Let us do our duty, and wait for the end, weary though it should be, and long of coming. But you won't forget cousin Gwen, will you, when you are full of occupation and interest in your own far land? And she will pray for you in her quiet home, and rejoice, too, in your happiness, as a sister and true—true friend. And now, good-bye!' She raised her eyes to my face with a proud, yet half-pleading look; one glance of shy tenderness, 'a sunbeam that had lost its way,' illumined the unbidden tears.

'Dearer than ever was sister or friend, my darling Gwen—mine and mine only!' I cried passionately, as I caught her to my breast in a gust of emotion, sudden as resistless. 'Come to this heart, and sway it while life lasts. This was the secret of my grief at our impending separation. Forgive me, my own, for my blindness to the love that was nearer, and is now thrice dearer, than aught else.'

'It has been yours, and yours only, since the first months of our acquaintance—before that wretched journey to Ireland, you wicked boy! But now, all is forgiven, more than forgiven—that is,' said she, raising

her head from my shoulder, with an approach to her old arch expression, 'if you are quite sure that you do *really* love me, and are not pitying or merely approving highly of my very proper or improper behaviour in your case.'

'Between us, Gwen, henceforth,' said I, as I took her sweet face in both hands, and held it *en profile* till I saw the expression I had so often sworn to myself was the perfect realisation of all purity and gentleness, as symbolised in the features of virgin womanhood, 'there will be no question of love more or less between us. You are mine in form and spirit, as I am yours till the parting, not of man, shall come.'

'I have no real doubt, Rolf. "Love such as mine hath no distrustful dread," as your favourite ballad says. Now we *must* go in.'

This, then, was the result and explanation of the anomalous mental condition in which I had found myself, when called upon to relinquish the sympathetic companionship, the talismanic affinity, the charmed atmosphere in which I had lingered so long. Misled, as men occasionally are, women more frequently, by the apparent want of difficulty and romance in the situation, I had told myself that the vital element claimed by the exacting Eros was wanting. Never till that last electrical moment, when, as the lightning flash shows the belated traveller the precipice upon which he stands, the haven which he has all unconsciously passed, had I realised the irrevocable loss which I, in careless blindness, was accepting, the golden gate which in the gloom of my wayward spirit I was ignoring. In the beatific revelation which followed, I felt the faintness which follows the escape from a mortal peril—the shuddering gratitude which is incorporated with every nerve and muscle of the bodily frame of him who knows himself yet the

living, thanks to the Lord and Giver of life. Whatever doubts and fears assailed me before the dawn of my fresh existence, paled and fled before my spirit's clear irradiating light. I knew myself beloved, blest in such wise as rarely falls to the lot of erring man, and borne upon a wave of joy far above the ills of life.

'Oh, you silly girl!' I said, after an explanation of mutual woes, oppressions, and endurances which need not be set down here, 'you have committed yourself to one of the splendid imprudences so dear to your sex. You will have to start for this unknown country of mine in a few weeks, for I cannot stay away from the front of the fight were there ten wives in question. And suppose we are ruined after all?'

'Such things are nothing—less than nothing,' said she, stopping my Cassandra prophesying; 'where *you* are, there will my place be; all the more surely in danger and trouble. But the real sorrow you have not named, though I know you have thought of it, Rolf! What will my father do, if both his daughters leave him?'

'Come out with us,' I answered, drawing a bow at a venture. 'He has no necessity to stay at home when you and Githa have fled from the old nest. Farm bailiffs and estate agents are abundant and capable. Let him come and see you in your own home. I believe it would add ten years to the Squire's life.'

'If he only *would*,' she murmured, smiling through her tears. 'Oh, Rolf, do you think it is possible? The hope of it quite cheers me. What a happy, happy creature I should be, if it would only come to pass. It is too, too much like perfect happiness to be true.'

Anon I confronted the Squire, and told my unvarnished tale. 'The fact is, my dear uncle, that Gwen and I had deluded ourselves into the belief that we

had merely a brotherly and sisterly love for one another. We have found out our mistake. I cannot live without her, and she has intimated to me that she is prepared to turn colonist for my unworthy sake.'

The old man looked at me with a vague and wondering air.

'My dear Rolf,' he said after a while, 'I had fallen into the same mistake as you two young people, for I never doubted till lately that only the natural and unconcealed affection of kinsfolk was the sentiment that existed between you. But I will not deny that of late I have fancied that Gwen would feel in your case more than the ordinary pain of parting from one to whom she was bound by mere ties of kindred. It has been arranged otherwise. The hand of God is visible in the matter to me'—here he bowed his head reverently—'and I acknowledge His will, and invoke His blessing upon my darling and her future husband.'

Here the strong man broke down. I wrung his hand.

'You have given me a portion of your own life,' said I. 'Be sure that I know the value of the sacrifice you are making; and may God deal with me, as I tend and prize the treasure you have bestowed. But is the separation inevitably necessary? What will you do when the Major returns to India?—Harold of course cannot stay.'

'You question me shrewdly, my boy, for nothing is more utterly impossible than that I should stay here alone when my girls are gone, and Harold. I see no insuperable obstacle to my leaving the old place with a good land steward. Heaven knows they are plentiful enough.'

'But what about your personal convenience?' continued I. 'You know that many of your present com-

forts, one might say luxuries, would be at once sacrificed in travel.'

'I am sixty-five,' said the Squire stoutly, standing up and spreading out his broad chest, 'and I've *no habits.* So much is in my favour. I tell you what, my boy, I will take my passage in the mail steamer, give myself a year's leave, and we will all *go together.* What do you say to that?'

'Say, my dear uncle?' cried I, grasping his hand again—'say? Why, that you have given Gwen and myself new life. It will add years to your own, I dare swear. You will relish the change immensely. My father will be overjoyed. I must go and tell Gwen.'

CHAPTER XLVIII

ALL the wondrous and well-nigh impossible preliminaries (as it seemed to me) having been settled, nothing remained but to fix the date of our marriage.

With rare good luck I had a controlling power in this matter, not often invested in the masculine contractor. I had explained at length to my uncle the imperative necessity of my departing without delay; drawn a pathetic picture of my respected father, struggling with a bad season, unsympathising banker, and unprecedentedly low prices, until the kind old man had declared that I was in honour bound to go by next mail, and for no earthly consideration would he persuade me to remain for another week.

To this decision I fixed him, and appealing to his chivalrous feelings, held out unswervingly for an early day, and gained it. Githa and the Major, with the

customary desire to see other people wearing the same fetters as themselves, were loud in their expressions of satisfaction.

'Oh, Gwen!' said the gentle Githa, 'suppose he had gone away without an explanation, what your future life would have been, I tremble to think. I am afraid you were not quite so wise in the matter as you ought to have been.'

'Don't *you* talk,' said Harold, joining the group; 'who engaged herself to a—well—let us say—penniless, hopeless subaltern, the worst of all detrimentals—in defiance of an infuriated governor? Other people were not so very wise. Suppose he had never come back, as is the nature of lieutenants in infantry regiments.'

'"All's well that ends well," Harold,' answered Githa, with sweet confidence in the happiness of her lot. 'We were right to understand each other. I would have waited for Guy till he was a general, if we couldn't have been married sooner.'

. . . . . .

The official announcement was made one day at dinner after the ladies had retired, and I thereupon tabled my motion that the Squire should accompany us in the mail steamer to the Great South Land, when he could see Gwen settled in her new home, gladden the heart of his brother Eric, and, taking India upon his homeward route, look up Harold and the Major—the marriages having been previously celebrated at the Chase upon the same day.

'My dear fellow,' said Harold, 'there's a rapidity and decision of plan about you Australians that takes one's breath away. You seem to have mapped out our affairs for years, lightly but irrevocably. Have you nothing to propose for my settlement in life? I feel quite unable to resist.'

'Nothing, unless when you take your next leave (Indians are always getting leave, for all sorts of reasons, if one may judge by the rapid recurrence of good fellows at our clubs), apply for it south of the line, and take home an Australian bride. I can show you such a girl or two, now I think of it.'

'Most considerate, really. Why didn't you appropriate one yourself? But I suppose I ought not to criticise your choice, or Gwen's either. Women enjoy sacrificing themselves, we all know.'

'We have no chance in the colonies against you army and navy fellows,' I answered resignedly, 'as you will discover when you pay us a visit. I'll deliver the Squire safely at Adelaide; and remember, you would never have had the chance of seeing him in the Mofussil, or teaching him the mysteries of *chotah hazree* tiffin and brandy pawnee, but for me.'

'Besides, hurrying up Githa and those confounded milliners,' chimed in the Major, 'a whole month earlier than I dared to hint at; you have my eternal gratitude, old fellow. I was just thinking of lashing myself into a—a fit of determination—a thing I hate, seeing how my leave is running out, when you settled it all for us. "Marry at leisure and repent in"—what's-y-name?—not quite applicable, is it? But what I mean—it will be so jolly to reel it right off in a fortnight, and have you and Gwen to form in line, in the same marching order. Pass the claret, Rolf, old fellow—most exhaustin' business altogether. You ought to be adjutant, and quartermaster-general, and so on. Great military talent lost to the nation.'

Here the fierce soldier, who had charged with his company up to the most obstinately defended gate of the beleaguered Lucknow, where the rebel artillery served their guns to the last with the fatal precision

which they had learned from their European officers in many a drill, and which he had entered with a ghastly wound in the face, finished his glass and leaned back in his chair with a look of grateful lassitude.

'Well, boys!' summed up the Squire, 'I feel relieved now it's all over; my spirits have gone up amazingly since I have decided to adopt Rolf's plan. You see, I only lose one daughter, which I should have done in any case; and I shall have Githa to console me when I part with Gwen. The change of scene will brace me up. I shall relish recalling old times with Eric. We were almost boys when we met last. Please God, we may all meet here again in five years' time.'

'Amen to that, uncle! Bad seasons don't last for ever, even in our thirsty land. Harold will have cut the service by that time, and the Major will be lieutenant-colonel. He might go in for a colonial appointment—inspector of defences, or master of the mint. We're awfully fond of Imperial officers who have seen service.'

'Another five years will about complete my detestation of India, I know,' said the Major, with unusual energy. 'So get into Parliament, Rolf, and do a little jobbery for your kith and kin. I should take kindly to a cool colony, with decent allowances and capital clubs, as lots of our fellows say you have.'

'The only thing that remains,' said Harold, with a reflective air, 'is to put up a card at the Lodge gates—"Gone to Australia — back in five years." But, Governor, don't you be going in for any of Rolf's maidens of the sunny South. The climate may have unforeseen effects; but I don't think I can stand that.'

'Take one yourself,' said the Squire with a sigh, that told of a brief joy, an enduring sorrow. 'Let me see you established at the Chase, with a good wife of

your own, and I shall have little more to wish for in this life.'

'Well, "I'll see what I can do, Governor—I'll see what I can do," as the song says, when I get my next step. Then, if I can keep a decent stable, I shall turn country gentleman, wear a copious white waistcoat, and secure the confidence of the county. There are worse lives, I don't doubt.'

And so, the time not permitting extended arrangements, an early day was fixed for the great 'double event,' as Harold disrespectfully termed the ceremony which crowned the happiness of four lives.

'North and south, and east and west, the messengers (postal) went forth,' and all the county, together with friends, chums, and acquaintances, from the inmost recesses of distant clubs, were bidden to the bridal. Aymer Brandon had, fortunately, not started for Rome, having found London tolerable for a few weeks more. Jack M'Callum and Herbert Ainslie were no farther afield than Paris, which they had taken *en route* for Norway and Sweden. For, having gone in a friend's yacht, they discovered that the bold yachtsman, after sending the *Esmeralda* round to Marseilles, in charge of the sailing master, and going to Paris himself, was in the habit, after a month's sojourn in the siren city, of telegraphing to that hardy seaman to take her back again. Such were his orders on the present occasion, so that a line to Meurice's fetched the brave colonists, who declared themselves 'only too happy,' and so forth. Norman Leslie had responded from Glen Duart, Bunter from the Reform Club, and Strongbowe from the same pleasant retreat. Charlie Templemore and O'Grady completed the Australian contingent. The latter wrote a characteristic epistle:—

MY DEAR BOY—I had always the highest opinion of your good taste and discretion, and now you have justified it. I had a look at the young lady once, just out of the corner of my eye, and from that, and what I hear, you are as lucky as I am myself. She's the right kind of wife to import, joining good looks to sound sense, and a desire to make the best of everything. I wouldn't give a fig for a woman that didn't want to see the country that has behaved so well to you and me. Harriet would give her eyes to go; but it is not necessary, at any rate at present. Jim Whitby is hereabouts; he was married to Mary Joyce the other day, and the divil's own fun they had. All the boys in Joyce's country were there. Johnnie Donnellan was best man, and Con Athy made a beautiful speech, and offered to kiss the bride, but Jim interfered. Johnnie goes back next month. He says, as the season is dry, he can't content himself in the settled districts any longer. Con Athy goes with him. I bought 'Corrib' for Harriet. I have business in London; maybe I'll run down to Hampshire about the day. Isidora sends her best wishes —that is, she would, I've no doubt, if I had told her, which I didn't. She is as handsome as ever, rather pale, but looks none the worse for that. Harriet says—but—never mind. Maybe some one might be looking over your shoulder when you read this.—Your old chum, MAURICE O'GRADY.

P.S.—My last advices from Australia are full of lamentation and mourning, bad debts, boiling down prices, desponding bankers, infuriated free selectors, and every shade of pleasurable excitement. But sure I needn't be raising your spirits. You will have them all to fight, and you're man enough, I think, for the work, if there was twice as much. When I think of it all, I wish I was going with you.

O'Grady was right. I began to feel the restless longing of the knight who has lingered amid the sun-flecked glades, the moonlighted greenswards, the dances in the hall, the whispers in the bower of the 'Royaume of Faerye.' For me the war-horse was champing bit and jangling bridle-rein. I had commenced to take down Excalibar, and to wonder when the good sword should rise and fall again, flashing bright in the sun-rays, or crimson-stained with Paynim blood. I was impatient to get to work once more.

The eventful day—so long awaited, so long hoped, prayed for—at length arrived, slow-winged but sure, as come all days of fortune or doom. The neighbouring houses were full of guests; the village inn, which had borne the sign of the Boldrewood Arms from days immemorial, was crowded with unwonted visitors. The preceding week had been fitful with the gusts and showers of the sternly parting winter. But *the* day—'Oh, day of all days of the year!'—broke clear and bright after the red dawn, which my sleepless eyes watched as it sundered itself from the sombre, unwilling night. As the bells rang cheerily out from the belfry of the ancient moss-grown church, whence many a birth and bridal of the race had been announced, my spirits rose. I walked forth joyously, and breathed with paradisal exaltation the holy morning air, replete with hopes that soared like the sky-tempting birds of spring.

CHAPTER XLIX

How shall one describe the indescribable? Could I, or other feeble chronicler, convey the faintest impression of that mirthful, pathetic, tragic, joyous pageant—a wedding, where hearts and vows are true as the symbolic circlet? At this ceremony, so ancient, so august, fraught with measureless woe or weal, let not the careless or world-worn jest. The sole volitional act of the three great epochs of existence, it stands midway between death and birth, more comprehensively weighty in its consequences than either. They can but affect the welfare of the solitary human unit. From

the ill-fated earthly union spring evils that may rack the bodies and the souls of generations yet to cumber the sad earth's surface.

Let no man mock at marriage! He who does so laughs with more than childish ignorance, or gibes with the cruelty of a fiend.

. . . . . .

The old church had never looked so gay, the villagers said, since the Squire's marriage. The monumental brasses of Earl Engelbert, of Osmond the Sea Rover, of the Crusaders, and other stalwart and efficient predecessors, gleamed with unwonted brightness. The school-children, robed in white, scattered flowers, and with tearful emotion invoked blessings on the heads of the gentle-souled brides, whose lives had been one long benefaction to them and their fellow-villagers. The county magnates, stirred to unwonted excitement by the news of my uncle's departure, gathered so numerously that the church hardly afforded the necessary accommodation, and the Squire's pew, that took up about a quarter of it, was crammed. Norman Leslie was my groomsman, and Aymer Brandon had the privilege of a position in close proximity to the bridesmaids, among whom Elinor Westland, attired in a composition of Mr. Worth, shone conspicuously lovely. While on the minor subject of dress, let me mention that on my last visit to London I had occasion to see the potentate of Savile Row, of whom I had been a considerable constituent. That suave official, the foreman, had just expressed a complimentary opinion of Australian customers, as being addicted to cash payments beyond any other sub-variety of the English-speaking race, when I inquired whether the head of the house by any chance was visible. Wonderful to relate, it appeared that he was. The thought flashed upon

me, half in jest, that this was an appropriate crisis for a personal interview with the rarely approached sovereign of the realm of habit and fashion. The request was acceded to. I was received with affability, tempered with the consciousness of power.

'Mr. Boldrewood, I believe! we have had the honour of a share of your patronage. Sorry to hear that you propose leaving for the colonies. You will let us have your address? We have constituents all over the world. In what way can I have the pleasure of serving you at present?'

Thus allured to the main object of the interview, I confided to the august Chief of Design that I was about to be married—that, feeling the occasion to be important, and the necessity of being irreproachably turned out extreme, I had ventured to solicit his counsel.

Listening with courteous interest, he entered into the matter with grave kindness, glanced at my figure and complexion, and having noted these, stated that he would arrange for my being suitably sent forth, and would hold himself responsible for the success of my costume. 'You may rely, Mr. Boldrewood,' said he, in concluding the interview, with the ease of a diplomatist, 'upon my personal exertion in the matter. May I presume to offer my congratulations, and as you have honoured me by this confidence, permit me to express a decided opinion that on this auspicious occasion you should, on no account whatever, think of *wearing new boots*. Good-morning, my dear sir—good-morning!'

It is superfluous to state that the engagement so liberally undertaken was fulfilled to the letter, and that I was enabled, upon my wedding morn, to bear myself with the composure of one who feels himself to be above criticism and beyond appeal.

A certain solemnity pervaded the assemblage during the ceremony, at which the white-haired Rector, himself deeply moved, transferred to comparative strangers the possession, irrevocable and eternal, of the gentle girls whose every growth and development he had watched since the days of infancy. The Squire, strong in the knowledge that the dreaded separation was postponed if not wholly evaded, was calmly cheerful, even gay, while Harold laid aside his ordinary coolness of manner, and successfully adopted the *rôle* of the heir of the house, with a winning courtesy which none excelled, when he saw fit to display it.

After we had ranged ourselves at the breakfast tables in the ancient hall, where banners, armour, and time-honoured relics were relieved by more modern ornamentation, 'the glowing vintage of champagne' commenced to lend its unfailing aid, and the flow of repressed mirth and joyous converse arose with the suddenness of a transformation scene.

'May I ask, Mr. Boldrewood,' said Bunter, who, attired with considerable splendour, looked like a Tory member who had the confidence of the county, 'whether you propose investing in Australia? I can recommend an estate or two, that you might remodel upon the pattern of the Chase.'

'First-class country, but rather confined for profit,' he remarked *sotto voce* to Strongbowe, who stood next to him.

'I can't say how the fineness of your climate may affect me, my dear sir,' answered the Squire. 'I feel young enough now for anything. But at present I only propose to see these young people in their own home, do a little Indian travel with Major Wyndham and my son, and then return to my good friends here and my old home for the remainder of my days.'

'You must stand for the county when you come back, Boldrewood!' said Sir Courtenay Oldacre; 'we want a man as a reference on colonial questions, and the extension of the empire. You will be quite an oracle when you return to us.'

'The Squire has a fair share of the pick of all creation, if he only knew it,' said O'Grady; 'maybe he does though, and he'll think more of it than ever after his travels. Not but what I'd like to have me ticket taken and be off in the mail to-morrow with me old friend Rolf. But I've been rash' (with a droll look at the adjacent bridesmaid, to whom he had been doing the amiable at a most bountiful Hibernian rate), 'and me ladye love isn't like Miss—I beg her pardon—Mrs. Rolf here; has no proper feeling for colonisation, and refuses point-blank to let me go see me neglected properties in Australia. Sure it's rooned I'll be, I told her last week, if this dry weather keeps on for a year or two. But she laughed and said, "That was nothing new for a Galway man, and we be in the fashion anyhow."'

'I daresay your twenty thousand a year in colonial securities will drop down to ten,' said Strongbowe, with a grave, budget-preparing expression; 'and Bunter's hundred and fifty—thou.'

CHAPTER L

'COME, none of your blowing!' growled that capitalist almost inaudibly, as I was gratified to observe.

'Will—a—suffer diminution. But it can't make any serious difference to you fellows. I'd go out in a moment myself, but my health is indifferent, as you

know. So I shall have to lose three thousand a year or so.'

'Till green leaves come again,' interposed Elinor Westland. 'What a croaking vein we seem to have got into. People will begin to think that it never rains at all in Australia, and that money turns into withered leaves or dry grass, like the fairy gold in the story books. Mr. Brandon, can't you suggest a more lively topic of conversation?'

'From certain signs,' answered Aymer, 'I am of opinion that Sir Courtenay meditates a speech. I thought there had been a new Act in force, by which wedding breakfasts had been abolished, and gatherings like this illegal. I am for total abolition, except in the matter of bridesmaids—there can't be too many of them.'

'Thanks for the concession,' retorted Miss Westland. 'I don't know but that the reform might be pushed too far, to the length of providing nothing but cigars and whisky and soda for the men, and cakes and curaçoa for us. However, this is Bracebridge Hall, you know, and the Squire is not the man to abate a jot of his ancestral customs. But we must listen to Sir Courtenay. Isn't he a dear old fellow? We girls all love him so.'

Sir Courtenay Oldacre justified the young ladies' encomium. If there be any meaning attached to the epithet 'high-bred,' he embodied the idea. In every movement of his slight, tall figure, in every expression of his delicately aquiline features, in every word from his perfectly moulded lips, was demonstrated the effect upon race of long generations of rule and security.

'He had been honoured,' he said, 'and he assured the ladies and gentlemen present that he felt both the distinction and responsibility—deeply—intensely, by his old friend Boldrewood's permission to introduce to

their notice, and their affectionate sympathy, he dared to add, a toast which all would drink with a quickened throb at the heart, and which, he trusted, he might be enabled to propose without tears in his eyes. They were met here to-day, in the ancestral hall of one of the oldest families in the shire, in the house of one of, perhaps, the most thoroughgoing sportsmen and respected country gentlemen in broad Hampshire, to celebrate the marriage of his daughters, two young ladies whom many assembled here to-day had known and loved from childhood. In some respects it might be termed a sad occasion, a farewell, and a departure; but on that aspect he was not about to dwell; and he begged, he implored, his charming friends, those young ladies whose handkerchiefs were now in requisition, to consider the brighter side of the celebration. They might need to do so in their own case, and before long, if he had not been unobservant.' (Cheers and laughter from the male auditory.) 'He would tell them, that while sympathising with his old friend in the, so to speak, loss of his beloved daughters, he could not but congratulate him from his heart when he saw the gentlemen whom he had taken into his family, who had now become the sons, as he might truly term them, of his ancient house. From that house there was no loss —as he had hastily expressed himself—there was an *addition* of strength and honour. His friend, Major Wyndham, whose father he had known in his youth, had fought the battles of his country amid the blood-stained snows of the Crimea, and the burning—a—plains of Hindostan.' (Tremendous cheering.) 'His young friend, Mr. Boldrewood, if he would permit him so to call him, he regretted to say he had been prevented by circumstances from knowing until a comparatively recent date. But it was plain to see that he was

one of the family, one of the good old stock. He as a colonist had been engaged in war, not with Her Majesty's enemies, but with the forces of nature—with the savages, and with the—a—wild beasts of a new land—conquests less splendid but not less valuable than those of his gallant friend, Major Wyndham. Perhaps he might be permitted to say, judging from his appearance and bearing, that he was fully capable of disposing of the Queen's enemies in that efficient fashion which had been the hereditary privilege of the race from which he sprang.' (Great cheering.)

'Oh, what a neat compliment to us poor colonists,' cried Miss Westland. 'Do you think he has any idea of a second wife, Mr. Brandon?'

'Perhaps you might ask him?' suggested Aymer. 'Women like a man to look up to, and so on.'

'How irresistible *you* ought to be then,' retorted the damsel rather naughtily. 'But hush! we're behaving shockingly. I declare he has finished. I thought he was going to say some more sweet things about girls. After all, I think sixty is about the nicest age—if men were all like Sir Courtenay, that is.'

'It is agreed by novelists and other observers of human nature, Miss Westland,' assented Brandon thoughtfully, 'that the age you have named is most favourable for contracting a headlong passion; as for inspiring that dangerous, probably apocryphal sentiment, I am not so certain. However, by waiting a few years I can make the experiment personally, when I shall be sure to let you know.'

'I confine my speculations to the Sir Courtenays strictly, Mr. Brandon. But don't you think we have talked nonsense enough for the present? Suppose we listen to Mr. O'Grady. He is looking mischievous as usual.'

Sir Courtenay having had a fair innings, the remaining efforts of oratory were rather compressed. O'Grady, in proposing the health of the bridesmaids, took occasion to lament his 'fettered condition, and to warn all his young friends of the danger of precipitation, as there was no knowing what supremely lovely and fascinating charms—as on the present occasion—might —a—appear on the horizon.'

The last specimen of festive rhetoric was that of the curate of Boldrewood parish, a young gentleman of ritualistic tendency and considerable length of vestment, who, in returning thanks for the health of the bridesmaids, 'claimed attention to the remarkable coincidence that this sacred and memorable day was actually St. Gwendoline's Day—a fact with which, he presumed, all good churchmen here present were acquainted. He might mention, for the benefit of those who were not in the daily habit of consulting the calendar, that St. Gwendoline, a maiden of exemplary life, had been sought in marriage unavailingly by a heathen gentleman—of—independent means. In spite of the advice of lukewarm friends, and the danger of persecution, which raged hotly at the period (321 A.D.), she adhered to her conscientious refusal.

'What then remained for the ardent but unconverted suitor, in his disappointment, but the dagger, the poisoned bowl—or—the pistol? He begged pardon if there was a slight anachronism in the mention of the last weapon. The incensed lover, whose name had not been preserved, chose none of these natural distractions. He denounced the heroic Christian maiden who chose martyrdom in preference to becoming the spouse of an unbeliever. He would conclude by stating his fixed belief that the lady who bore St. Gwendoline's name was fully capable of emulating her heroism.' (Great cheering.)

Before we had quite recovered from the life and times of St. Gwendoline, her more fortunate representative, and her sister, appeared in becoming travelling costumes, and the drag rattling up with the team lavishly be-ribboned and rosetted, we were whirled away with the usual shower of benedictions, boots (white satin), smiles, slippers, and all the usual concomitants of the finale. Our destination was Paris, where, in a fortnight, the Squire was to join us, and upon his arrival, we had arranged to commence our journey in good earnest, by hasting to join the *Kaiser-i-Hind* at Marseilles.

. . . . . .

At this point must conclude the chronicle of 'My Run Home.' The heroine having been happily and securely married, all judicious readers will admit that a stage has been reached beyond which no contemporary historian can, with propriety, pass. If, in the future, it should chance that interest be aroused in her welfare, I may persuade my darling Gwen to unfold a few leaves of that journal, which all properly disposed young married women keep, and to furnish a record of her life in the Great South Land, to which in undoubting faith she loyally followed her lord.

THE END

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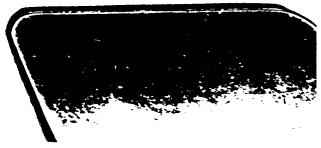
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